

Greenmount – March 2007

The unusually mild weather is encouraging the vegetation to grow and I have had to cut the moss that comprises about 75% of the front lawn. I was planning to improve the front garden, having finished the back lawn last year. Unfortunately, the back lawn has taken a turn for the worse and is demanding some attention. I have fed it, filled in a small depression and seeded the parts where the turf has thinned. I should know whether my attempts to resuscitate it have been successful in a couple of weeks or so.

I also took the opportunity to, once again, clean the cat's latrine and to start the task of clearing the weeds and moss from the block paving on the drive. The older one gets, the easier this latter job becomes, as it requires one to crawl about on all fours.

Rachel has booked her driving test for the middle of April, which, hopefully, will render my taxi-driving skills redundant.

I think I have, at last, mastered the editing TV video recordings on the computer using Nero software. I could not understand, until now, why the programmes with the advertisements removed occupied more disc space than the original recording. It seems that it is all to do with something called the bit rate of the edited recording. I have discovered, by doing some calculations based on the original file size and the amount of time for which the recording runs, that selecting a bit rate of 3,015 k bits per second, when writing the edited (MPEG2) file, gives a result as good as the original and the amount of space taken up is roughly less than the original in the same proportion as the running time. What is a puzzle is that when I analyse the content of the new file, the tools I use all report a bit rate of 6030 k bps, double that intended. Still, it seems to work and I am now trying the same technique, exporting DVDs to MPEG2 movie files on my PC.

The company from which I purchased my TV software, Showshifter, was broken up and sold off some months ago and a new company called Phoenix has taken on the task of developing the software further. I anxiously await their new release to fix all the annoying bugs, although I suspect I shall have to acquire a new license. For those of you with the home edition of Vista, Microsoft's new operating system, you don't need to worry about such niceties. Vista home edition includes Media Centre software to manage DVDs, TV, music, etc., complete, it seems, with an MPEG2 decoder.

I have successfully acquired a Dell lap top for my first customer (you know who you are) at a discount and, being the astute businessman I am, made nothing on the deal. I did have the privilege of configuring the Vista OS and wireless networking though.

On this latter subject, I have prepared a Powerpoint presentation, showing how to securely configure a wireless network in Windows XP. If anyone would like a copy, please let me know.

Jenny decided it was time we re-organised the furniture in our bedroom and has had me manoeuvring solid oak furniture. It all went quite well on the day. The following day proved to be a bit of a challenge, though. I was as stiff as a board in all places except a most important one and had that not been the case, too immobile to make good use of it.

After some discussion, I reached a compromise with AEG over the repair to the dishwasher. AEG agreed to pay for the parts if I paid for the labour. The chap duly arrived, took the dishwasher to pieces and announced that I needed new electronic components, a fact that I had already reported on the fault call. He then informed me he would have to order them and went away. Ten days later, he returned, fitted the two new complete boxes and turned on the unit. It burst into life, happily displaying all of the relevant information in the display panel – in German. After another half-an hour of fiddling, between us, with my limited knowledge of this wonderful language, we managed to change the language to English. So we now have a working dishwasher, at a cost to me of £58.75. I give AEG eight out of ten for sorting this out. They're still not as good as Dyson, though, who still score eleven out of ten. What a pity Dyson doesn't make a dishwasher. Still, AEG is back on my list of reasonable makes, even if their equipment is not rated as being as reliable as Bosch (see various Which? reports).