

Things you may have missed

Two joyriders attempting their getaway were thwarted when their choice of vehicle turned out to be a milkfloat capable of 12mph. The intrepid duo were soon apprehended by police.

A Singaporean student has smashed the world record for high speed texting by sending a 160 character message in 43.34 seconds, knocking 20 seconds off the previous record.

Microsoft has reportedly succeeding in patenting human skin as a new kind of network. Apparently, the plan is to link several devices using skin as a connector.

A Japanese toymaker claims to have invented a device that can help people control their dreams. It is claimed that the Dream Workshop has a success rate of 22%.

Russian airline Aeroflot is taking legal action against a film director whose latest movie features one of their aircraft nearly crashing after being cursed.

Shane Shafer of New Orleans has received a first-of-its kind electronic device that has finally cured him of 50 years of hiccups. The vagus nerve simulator affects the signals sent from the brain to the diaphragm.

Computer games enthusiast *Chris Pope* teamed up with colleague *Neil Wilks* to put a new educational game through its paces. So, did they learn anything – or was it just for fun?

Time Engineers is that rare thing: a computer game that aims to educate. There are none of the guns or fast cars that the flashy, high budget console games rely on to attract teenagers, but there is plenty to intrigue the young, enquiring mind.

While a basic grasp of engineering principles and logic is certainly needed, Time Engineers offers a wide variety of challenges for youngsters, by sending them back through time to refine the operation of a series of machines.

Produced by American educational games makers Software Kids in association with Valparaiso University of Indiana, Time Engineers is certainly testing. Getting into the time travel pod itself requires passing a couple of tasks involving binary conversions and Boolean logic that may well send younger players in the 10-15 target age range off to ask their parents for help.

Chronologically speaking, first up is ancient Egypt, where the gamer is faced with two civil engineering challenges: to build one level of a pyramid and to provide irrigation for crops. The key

to both these missions lies in the principles of geometry and physical sciences such as forces, friction, motion and water flow.

Inside story

It's 1428 and in Angers, France, the player tackles the engineering of castles. The operation of a drawbridge may sound an open and shut case, but by selecting parameters such as the size of the counterweight, diameter of the wheel and the number of people pulling the ropes, players get a feel as to how each one affects the speed of the drawbridge's movement.

Once the drawbridge has been lowered, players move outside to the assault catapult. Similar principles must be applied here in order to make an appropriate size of rock hit a target at a

specified distance.

The final challenge takes place in World War II and looks at electrical engineering. The task is to specify a submarine that can cross the Atlantic undetected. Players assess the amount of power available from batteries, the type and number of motors used.

Finally, the intrepid time engineer tackles probability and electromagnetic waves to design radar sites across the British south coast. Here, the focus, sweep and strength of the transmission must be determined to ensure the most effective radar coverage.

At each stage there is an info page that can be clicked on to explain the principles behind each challenge, complete with algebraic equations. While this will fill in the gaps for the older players, less tenacious gamers can stick with trial and error in order to complete the tasks.

As well as being treated like an adventure game, each stage can be reached individually, allowing the ages to be re-visited and making the game ideal for the classroom.

While it lacks the flashy, fast moving graphics of other more popular games, the need to solve puzzles both logically and methodically makes this a refreshing alternative to the Playstation genre.

To find out more about the game or to buy it, go to www.timeengineers.com.



Screen test: Using the game will boost knowledge

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Printed at Cradley Print, Cradley Heath, West Midlands, B64 6AB. Typeset by the London Pre-Press Centre, London EC1.