

technopolis

Cruise the highways and rat runs of Gizmo City with the grand wizard of gadgetology, Jonathan Margolis.



SPEEDO AQUABEAT

Remember when you were at school, and there'd be a joke you always laughed at but never quite knew what it was about? It's like that today with me and Speedos. I'm dimly aware that these are snugly fitting swimming trunks that raise guffaws. When we went on

holiday to Romania a few years ago (don't ask), everyone said, "Wow, you'd better get some Speedos for the pool." "Ha, ha," I would say, although I still don't know why they are so funny.

So when I found this Speedo waterproof MP3 player, naturally, I went, "Ha, ha, that's so funny."

The Speedo Aquabeat is really good, though, and if, for whatever reason, the logo embarrasses you, it's discreet. It only has 1Gb of memory, enough for 500 tracks, but that's enough to swim the Channel without repeating a song - though, if you are really thinking of swimming to France, you'll have to do it sans Aquabeat, as it's not recommended for use in salt water. You can, however, listen to music underwater, down to three metres, as well as in the bath, Jacuzzi or steam room - Aquabeat is OK to 60°C.

£65, from Speedo, 41-43 Neal Street, London WC2 (0845-850 8582; www.speedo.co.uk) and stockists.



OLYMPUS XZ-1

You could spend half your life debating the perfect travel camera. Do you go, as do so many tourists, for a DSLR the size of a food mixer and whose abilities far exceed anything you either need or would be able to handle? Are "mirrorless" DSLRs such as the Olympus PEN models or the Sony NEX, with interchangeable lenses but a small, lightweight body, ideal for your travel habits? Or is the best job just a good mobile-phone camera, which is far from a silly option?

Somewhere within this range comes a category ideal for travel, but which tends to get overlooked - quality compacts that don't boast swappable lenses or anything fancy, but are good enough to take the odd award-winning photo in foreign climes.

There's no actual shortage of such cameras - I could name the Canon PowerShot S95, the Nikon Coolpix P300 and the Lumix DMC-LX5 off the top of Google's head. But this new one from smart-but-niche Olympus is the best I've encountered, even though it's not caused much of a stir on the high street.

The XZ-1 can be snapped up for £400 (admittedly the price of a starter-model food-mixer DSLR), or less from several websites. The XZ-1 has an unusually big 10 megapixel chip, which ensures its pictures look luscious, and a fine 4x optical zoom for sharpness and detail. The lens zooms from (in 35mm terms, as ever) 28mm to 112mm to cover any holiday eventuality bar distant wildlife. The best thing about the XZ-1's lens, however, is that it's a really unusual (at this level) f1.8, making the camera the king of low-light photography without horrible flash - which I hope you, as readers of style and sophistication, use as little as possible. Using the wide aperture with a fast shutter speed in good light also gives a professional-looking out-of-focus background.

All things are bright and beautiful round the back of the XZ-1, too, with a splendid 3in, high-resolution OLED screen. Olympus also does a clip-on electronic viewfinder (£220) for bright-light use, again quite rare in the class.

There are too many more good things to mention, but this is an impressive, easy-to-use camera you should love. £400, in black or white, from www.olympus.co.uk. Call 0800-111 4888 for stockists or Google for best price.



FOR EXCLUSIVE VIDEO BULLETINS OF JONATHAN'S HIGH-TECH WIZARDRY, GO TO TECHNOPOPOLIS TV AT WWW.HOWTOSPENDIT.COM AND FOLLOW JONATHAN AT [TWITTER.COM/TECHNOPOLISFT](https://twitter.com/technopolisft)

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HUGH THRELFALL

DUNHILL SOLAR CHARGER

The estimable house of Alfred Dunhill is known more than anything for extremely nice men's clothing. But, as aficionados will know, the brand was first famous for gadgets, particularly those that pertained a century ago to the new gentleman's pastime of travelling by motor car.

So while it may seem an odd thing to buy in a Dunhill store, this flip-open solar charger for mobiles, iPods, e-books etc, is well within the brand's travel remit. It's actually a poshed-up variant of the popular Freeloader Pro, which has been charging travellers' gadgetry by sunlight for a few years. Being Dunhill, this version is useful and durable but also stylish and pleurably tactile: a bit of a carbon-fibre effect, lots of brushed aerospace aluminium and a particularly nice leather case. Technically, it's pretty accomplished too, and will, from a good session in the sun, provide up to 30 hours of charging time. The charger itself can also be recharged via a computer USB port if sunlight is in short supply, or circumstances dictate that you need to fill it with juice at night. £145, from Dunhill, 2 Davies Street, London W1 (0845-458 0779; www.dunhill.com) and branches/stockists.



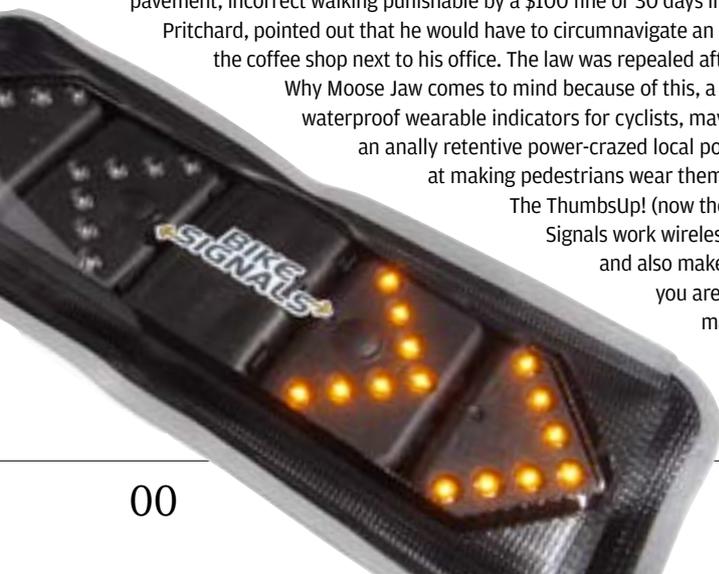
THUMBSUP! BIKE SIGNALS

One of my favourite ever local-council stories concerns the city of Moose Jaw in Saskatchewan, Canada, in the 1970s, where there was a major problem of pedestrians bumping into one another. So on January 4 1970, the council passed bylaw 2423 forcing pedestrians to walk only on the right-hand side of the pavement, incorrect walking punishable by a \$100 fine or 30 days in jail. One sceptic, Alderman Gordon Pritchard, pointed out that he would have to circumnavigate an entire city block to get a sandwich from the coffee shop next to his office. The law was repealed after 14 years without a single charge laid.

Why Moose Jaw comes to mind because of this, a set of (actually very, very sensible) waterproof wearable indicators for cyclists, may seem a mite obscure, but if I were an anally retentive power-crazed local politician, I think I might have a stab at making pedestrians wear them too.

The ThumbsUp! (now there's a bad brand name for you) Bike Signals work wirelessly from a handlebar remote control and also make a beeping noise to warn walkers that you are turning. A bit on the eccentric side, maybe, but excellent, and light enough to pack for a cycling trip abroad.

£30, from www.paramountzone.com; 0844-873 3220.



SILLY STREET

As I may have mentioned 200 times before, I am a paranoid backup nut. Not content with keeping two full backups of my hard drive in different locations, I also e-mail myself all new documents I create on my travels. If there were a real cataclysm, however, and both my backups and my laptop were lost and the remote servers where my e-mail lives were destroyed and the power went down across the world, I would, at least, be able to make a nice cup of tea, thanks to this marvellous British gadget, the mKettle. It will boil a pint of water in as little as six minutes using sticks and leaves or even wool. Do keep matches in your kitbag for when the balloon goes up, though. mKettle, £47, from www.mkettle.com; 0203-393 3033.

