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ZyXEL PL-100 PowerLine Ethernet Adapter

Want long range connectivity without the hassle of wireless? Perhaps ZyXEL has the answer

by Davey Winder published on 10 March 2006

It's a scenario that's played out in houses across the nation, you want to get your internet connection to a part of the house that your wireless network just can't reach. OK then, try good old Ethernet then? Ah yes, this would be fine apart for one major domestic design flaw: the wife. For some reason Significant Others often are adverse to you trailing CAT 5 cable all over the house, or lifting the floorboards and digging channels in the walls to hide them. The PowerLine adapters from ZyXEL allow you to extend your "wireless" network to anywhere within reach of a standard 13AMP electricity socket. Plug an adapter into the wall near to your main PC or broadband router and connect the two using standard, Ethernet cable. Now do the same wherever you want that network to reach and, once you've installed the drivers from the CD, which is easy just a matter of a click and a minute, that's it. OK, so it's not really wireless, there's the bit of cable that connects your laptop, PC, network device to the adapter for a start - which means it's not suitable for the kind of laptop in hand wandering that some people want, but it's as near as dammit. So what's the catch? If all you want to do is the normal of web browsing, email, chat and audio and video streaming then none at all really. The PowerLine network can handle this stuff in its stride because it doesn't require a great amount of bandwidth. We wouldn't want to run a large office network on it as we fear it might collapse under the strain, or at least come to a grinding halt. Far from the claimed 85Mbps data rate, the highest we managed to sustain was 12Mbps and the average was only 5Mbps. However, remember that your broadband connection is likely to only be 1 or 2Mbps so it's not exactly slow going (unless you want to share



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it between too many family members at the same time). Also bear in mind that it will only operate on the same ring circuit, all attached to the same fusebox/meter basically, so no sharing amongst flats or with the next door neighbour.

VERDICT

Aside from a few grumbles the PL-100 PowerLine Ethernet Adapter from ZyXEL really rather good, but keep an eye on the price because at £70 a unit it soon adds up to more than a decent MIMO Wi-Fi router and the right adapters to spread real wireless networking around the house and down the garden path. The easiest way to get your house networked if not the cheapest. But it does "just work" and we like that, a lot.

At a glance

What is it?

Wireless 85Mbps Ethernet network that transports data across standard electricity wiring

Good

Plug and play - literally! Simple secure networking

Bad

Not as fast as claimed, not as flexible as

Verdict

If you don't want wires, and wireless won't work, PowerLine adapters are a good compromise

Price £70

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10