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Devolo dLAN 200 AV Wireless G Starter Kit

Wired wireless home networking

by Chris Hall published on 15 January 2009

We've long been sold on the HomePlug concept, allowing you to use the mains wiring in your house for your home networking. Devolo have a complete range of networking products that support this concept. Their dLAN 200 AV Wireless G adapter gives you the benefit of being able to put a wireless end to wired network.

Devolo might use somewhat long-winded titles, but at least you know what is in the box: dLAN 200 (HomePlug with 200Mbps transfer rates) AV (perfect for audio visual) Wireless G (with Wi-Fi) Starter Kit (everything you need).

The Starter Kit consists of two component parts, the essential first plug that you connect to your router to get the network into your mains wiring and the end Wi-Fi adapter block that resembles a router, minus the broadband connection, giving you four LAN ports and your Wi-Fi G station.

It is quite literally a case of plug and play. After plugging in both components and connecting to the router, it quickly extends the network out to the end point. The "normal" plug used to connect to your router is a little large, so you might not be able to fit a plug alongside if you are connecting it to an extension block. The plugs can also become hot, so worth thinking about where it is going to sit. Under a cushion is not a good idea...

It is also recommended that you don't plug your adapters into extensions as this will degrade the performance over the nice thick mains cables. Whilst this is true, it might not impact on what you are doing, especially if only browsing the Internet or streaming music. But to get the best from your HD content, you'll want to eliminate excess extensions. The losses vary, but typically you'll be down to about 150Mbps over a short run with multi socket extenders at both ends. At the most



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extreme it could be cut to 50Mbps should you extend this further through long extension cables and lots of adaptors.

The mains plug that powers the Wi-Fi adapter also connects it to the network, which is a tidy solution and the Wi-Fi adapter is clever because it is not just a Wi-Fi access point - as those four LAN ports mean you can connect more devices, perhaps in your home cinema where you have a PS3, Xbox 360 or Ethernet-enabled TV, straight to the wires and avoid the need for Wi-Fi adapters.

The transfer rate of 200Mbps also beats your regular Wi-Fi meaning that streaming high-definition content from your PC will be no problem. But that negates the Wi-Fi element of the kit here which adds in an additional dimension, giving you the best of both worlds. You can pick up your content from a uPnP server for your networked Hi-Fi and still have the freedom to use the Wi-Fi for browsing the Internet on your laptop.

If you are one of the (probably relatively few) people that doesn't have a wireless network in your house, then this will give you that freedom also, albeit at a higher cost than some other simple Wi-Fi adapter solutions. But it also works well as a Wi-Fi extender, allowing you to add networking into an outbuilding, perhaps a home office or garage, that has power, although if you do have an existing Wi-Fi network this will treat itself as a new network and you will have to set it all up.

The included CD contains all the applications that you need to manage your Wi-Fi adapter, as well as the normal applications you'd use for the wired aspects and to keep tabs on the performance of your network. The specific Wi-Fi settings on the first instance don't push you towards protecting your network, so on connection it is just a free-for-all and anyone can connect. You have to dive into the "change configuration" option to access the

At a glance

What is it?

HomePlug Wi-Fi adapter

Good

Plug and play, introduce Wi-Fi anywhere from your mains wiring, gives you additional ports, press button encryptions

Bad

Price, plug gets hot, large size

Verdict

The convenience of plug and play networking, introducing Wi-Fi for maximum freedom. A tidy solution, if a little expensive

Price £190

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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security settings.

Security contains the normal WEP/WPA/WPA2 options, as well as the option to turn off the SSID if you choose. You can also password protect access to the configuration options, which is worth doing too. If you have existing Devolo products that are also password protected, then you'll have to add in your network password to include the extra device. This is also worth doing as it prevents some industrious hacker adding an extra adapter to your network and stealing your contacts, especially if you share your wiring around the building with others.

But then you also get 128-bit encryption at the press of a button. The buttons lurk around the back of the Wi-Fi unit, next to the button to disable the wireless access, and on the base of the normal plug unit, as it is on other Devolo products, meaning anything travelling over the wires is then encrypted.

VERDICT

The HomePlug system in general is a very easy to use solution to home networking, avoiding the frustration of installing cables or buying wireless adapters - you simply plug and play. With increasing connectivity in AV devices, we expect to see growing interest in this sort of solution.

The dLAN 200 AV Wireless G kit gives you the best of both worlds: an easy wired hub as well as a Wi-Fi network. But this is a relatively expensive way to achieve your networked solution if it doesn't exactly fit your requirements, so it is worth looking at the components in the range, rather than just jumping in for the kit that offers everything.