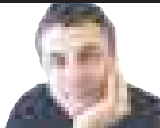


# Safer shift in better browser

**Craig Gamble**  
FAST LIVING



**D**o you care which browser you use? Do you, in fact, even know what a browser is? The browser was the subject of a question asked by a Google employee in a recent potted survey in New York's Times Square. There's a clip on YouTube showing responses when people were asked, "What is a browser?" Many confused a browser with a search engine, saying they use Google or Yahoo.

Others described a browser as what you use when you know what you're looking for, while a search engine is what you use when you don't know what you're looking for – no, I don't understand that either. My own quick survey of my non-techie friends revealed similar results, many mentioning Google. And no one in either "survey" referred to any browser by name.

It's possible that everyone is right not to care. The "browser wars" have in essence been over for as long as the internet has been around. Such is Microsoft's dominance of the PC market that their browser – Internet Explorer – is today used by about two-thirds of all web users. A surprising 25 per cent of users still use Internet Explorer 6, a version two behind the current one.

Of the other browsers out there, Google's Chrome has managed to gain only 3 per cent of the market since it was launched last year, Apple's Safari sits on about 4 per cent and Opera on 2 per cent. Mozilla's Firefox is the only other browser to have made any sort of inroad in recent years, taking about 23 per cent. There are some yearly fluctuations behind these shares, but they never move a lot. Explorer sits on its majority and the others fight over the scraps.

The companies involved care very



much about such things. They realise that if they can get their browser on to your computer, they gain an invaluable "in" with you as a customer – even if we don't notice they're doing it. Google, of course, whose business is based on people using the internet, is especially interested in this, and its own browser is one way the company directs still more traffic to its own web pages. Even Apple, which long ago gave up the PC market to Microsoft, has seeded a Windows version of its browser with every

copy of iTunes downloaded, in an attempt, one presumes, to get more people to see the Apple coloured light.

Now Google has come up with an even sneakier way of getting into your machine. The company has come up with a little piece of code, called Chrome Frame, which essentially plugs into your copy of Explorer and tricks it into behaving exactly like Google's browser, Chrome. Google says it's doing this to help out developers, who previously have had to spend a lot of time making new



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web features work with Explorer, especially the older versions, which just can't handle some of the newer fun things you can do on the web. Things like Google maps can be painfully slow on Explorer 6, and that version doesn't even support tabbed browsing, which lets you have a whole bunch of pages open at once in tabs along the top of the browser window.

But these are the tiniest part of what a good browser should do for you these days. Microsoft, of course, claims that Google Frame opens up PCs to more security risks than the proper Explorer version. Maybe so, if you're using the latest version, but certainly not if you're still stuck in the dark ages of Explorer 6.

You might think Explorer's dominance indicates consumer choice – maybe Explorer is easy to use and people just prefer it – but that's simply not the case. Microsoft's dominance is a matter of default. Because Windows is predominant on the world's PCs, and all copies ship with Explorer pre-installed, most people use it in blissful ignorance of any alternative, and as the YouTube video shows, don't question it. So why should they?

The biggest problem with using an old browser, like Explorer 6, is its lack of security features. Newer browsers like the latest version of Mozilla's Firefox have features that can warn you if the site you are trying to visit is likely to cause your computer harm, or try to scam you. The newest version of Explorer has similar security features, and can also easily identify the source of a site – a good way to get a hint of its reliability and security. Features such as one-click bookmarking or much faster web page rendering may also set your heart all a-flutter.

It's the 25 per cent of users still trudging through the mud of Explorer 6 who really worry me. If that's you, do yourself a favour and download a free copy of Firefox, or even the latest version of Explorer.

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## Taking a stand on healthy cycles and steering the right course

**SLOW LIVING**



The Slow Movement website reminds us: "Natural rhythms guide all that we do – our very existence. Our breath and heartbeat are constant reminders of life's pulsing rhythm that moves within and around us."

When you're riding a bike, this becomes very obvious – especially if you haven't ridden for a while. And you don't have to be going fast to appreciate your "pulsing rhythm". Just fast enough to achieve the gyroscopic precession-effect of the

wheels that helps keep you upright, raise the heart-rate a bit and keep ahead of any pursuing dogs – the older ones, anyway. So I'm not talking about lycra-cycling, where you grind your groin to a pulp. The "sitting upright and looking at the world" bike-riding will do the trick. This said, Wikipedia says that "the carbon dioxide generated in the production and transportation of the food required by the bicyclist, per mile travelled, is less than 1/10th that generated by energy efficient cars." There is no comparative information, however, about exhaust rates!

And even that most frantically physical bike-riding – the 1000m sprint – can have an element of complete still-

ness. It's called "the track-stand", where one or both riders hold a stationary position (without falling over), waiting for the other rider to make a move. A long time ago, when I rode competitively-ish, the track-stand was as whimsically intriguing as the switching back and forth of the following 800m, and as keenly contested as the last 200m heart-bursting, head-down hurl to the line. But the rules have changed to prevent that: "Riders must cycle at a minimum of walking pace for the first lap, and are not allowed to stand still for more than three minutes on the second lap."

With the increasing use of bikes, for good health-and-environmental reasons, I've a family tale that offers



**I've a family tale that offers a faintly ironic perspective to this renewed push into cycling for the masses.**

a faintly ironic perspective. My maternal grandfather, who was hand-making bicycles at the turn of the 19th century, went on to buy his own bicycle shop, and did well enough to purchase an American Hupmobile motor car, noted for its quiet engine. Early in his proud ownership of this vehicle, he was motoring gently down a lane in the gathering gloom of a Somerset evening. The headlamps were already alight, and as he halted at the approach of an elderly cyclist, a resolute call was easily heard over the softly idling engine: "Stay where ee be – I'm comin' a'tween ee"!

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