

# So you need a new aerial?

There are a lot of bad aerial installers out there, warns veteran rigger **Bill Wright**

The TV picture hasn't been good for some time, then last night there was a gale and this morning the neighbour rang, "Hello John, I hope you don't mind me bothering you but do you know your aerial is in our greenhouse?"

So once the broken glass has been cleared up and the profuse apologies given it's time to get the phone book out and find an aerial installer. But whoa! Let's just stop and think before we invite any old person round to do the job.

A lot of installers care about the quality of their work and give their customers a fair deal. I'm sorry to tell you though, that good skilled installers are in a minority. The rest of the trade ranges from the merely incompetent to the downright crooks, with every variety in between. Stick a pin in the big yellow book and there's a significant chance that you'll end up with someone knocking on your door who might be an incompetent idiot, or worse might be a convincing but devious individual who will take you for every penny he can get.

Smart adverts and web sites are no guarantee of quality, and in fact some of the slickest-looking outfits will rip off the unwary on a grand scale. Huge adverts in the phone book are sometimes the front for a franchise-type operation, so you are simply paying extra in order to meet a dodgy local rigger who is desperate for work because he is no good.

How can you find a decent aerial or dish installer? The answer is in one word – recommendation. Think around your circle of friends. Who has lived in the area for many years? Who has a house full of television sets? Who lives in a bad TV reception area? Who is shrewd? These are the ones to ask. If you can, find out who maintains aerials on a 'repeat business' basis for the local schools, flats, and hospitals. Property management agents usually have a list of reliable contractors.

If you can't get a firm recommendation from anyone, a good tactic is to ask any potential



Bill Wright

## Dish on mast

A dish on a mast will catch the wind. If the dish really does have to be mounted like this — and such a fixing should be regarded as a last resort — an aluminium scaffold tube should be used, not an aerial mast.

installers if they have public liability insurance, and whether they use a roof ladder. A good installer won't mind these questions, but many cowboys will fear that you might turn awkward, and you will probably sense their sudden lack of interest!

When you find an installer, don't be put off if he tells you that you will have to wait for a week for a non-urgent job. Good installers have lots of work, and they usually give priority to genuine emergencies. So be patient.

If there are severe parking problems in your area, or if it isn't possible to get a vehicle anywhere near the house, be up front about it. Likewise, if your building can't be scaled with a normal ladder (more than 8 metres to the gutter) then mention it at the outset.

Don't ring round for the cheapest quote. Those who quote low do it because they are short of work. This could be because they are new to the job, or it could be that they intend to switch sell. This is a common ploy in which the customer is conned into having a much more expensive job done 'because this is a very dodgy reception area' or because 'digital aerials are more expensive'. There is no such thing as a digital aerial, and any installer who attempts to up the price by using the word 'digital' in this way is a crook. In some areas it's necessary to

use a wideband aerial for DTT rather than a grouped one, but there is no difference in cost.

In places where the digital signals are weak a better aerial might be needed, but this is a quality issue which is also relevant to analogue reception.

When the rigger of your choice arrives, let's hope he has a properly equipped van rather than an estate car with a few aerials in the back. Let's hope he has some decent test equipment – a spectrum analyser is essential. Let's hope he has proper ladders and safety equipment, public liability insurance, and a numbered invoice book. If his sartorial style is epitomised by his tattered bobble hat, his skin is liberally embellished with amateurish tattoos, he has a slimy roll-up in the corner of his mouth and a disrespectful attitude to your new white carpet, I respectfully suggest that you might have chosen unwisely. Typical shortcuts used by dodgy installers are the re-use of the old chimney (or wall) brackets and the old downlead cable.

If there is any doubt about reception conditions in the area a good installer will take a test aerial and an analyser onto the roof and measure the signals from all possible transmitters and at all feasible locations. You should then be told just what is needed and how much it will cost, and the figure should be within the range mentioned at the initial contact. Expect to pay between £100 and £150 plus VAT

#### LNB waterproofing

It's essential that the connections on a satellite dish are properly waterproofed. If they aren't the cable can become saturated internally along its length. Wrapping a bit of insulating tape around the plugs does no good at all.



Bill Wright

#### Brick damage

These bricks must have cracked when the bolts were screwed into the plastic plugs. Nevertheless the installer was satisfied with his work. The dish fell over after three weeks. Even in good brickwork, plastic plugs are suitable only for the lightest loads.

for a standard good quality aerial with all fixings and one downlead cable.

If a tall mast, a really big aerial, or a masthead amplifier is needed the cost will be more, taking the price to a possible £275 plus VAT. If roof access is abnormally difficult this will also be reflected in the quotation. If you live miles from anywhere expect to pay something towards the travel costs. When the job is done you should insist on a proper invoice which includes the firm's details.

Speaking personally, I'm disheartened by the diabolical work done these days by many so-called installers. Every week I see installations that are unsafe, unsightly, or ineffective. Every week I meet people who have been ripped-off.

Vulnerable people are the main victims of the vulture-like installers, but even if you're young, clever, and clued-up you aren't immune. If you think garage mechanics and plumbers can be bad you should see what some riggers get up to! Actually, now you can. Although fraud, misrepresentation, and over-charging can't be photographed, lousy installations can. So, reproduced here for your delectation and delight — or should it be horror and alarm? — are a few shots showing some of the worst excesses of the cowboy riggers' art.

If you want to see more take a look at the Rogues' Gallery on [www.wrightsaerials.tv](http://www.wrightsaerials.tv) - me, I look at these pictures and I don't know whether to laugh or cry! ■