

# Cutting corners is a cowboys' charter

Bill Wright's our inside man in the world of dish and aerial installation

**T**he voice on the phone was full of confidence and savoir faire. 'How much will you charge to erect my aerial, labour only?'

I groaned fairly inaudibly. The brassy voice continued unabashed, 'I can get an aerial for fifty quid and I want you to fix it on the roof.'

At one time when people enquired in this vein I would patiently ask whether they'd bought the right size of mast, the correct chimney fixing, and some good quality double-screened cable. I'd talk about channel groups and ask whether the aerial was grouped or wideband, and explain which it ought to be. I'd discuss possible reception problems in the area and try to assess whether the aerial would be adequate. I'd ask where the aerial had come from, knowing that some of the DIY-shed specials look good but perform abysmally. But nowadays I don't bother. I'm getting old, you see, and a bit cantankerous.

So I said to this chap, 'Look, if we come out and install your own aerial we'll charge you £90 + VAT. But I can't promise that you'll be left with a

satisfactory installation because the gear you've bought is probably wrong in some way, and we won't be able to guarantee the overall safety or security of the installation because we didn't supply the materials. But if you let us supply the equipment it will be top quality and tailored for the job, with guaranteed results and the backing of a £1 million public liability policy. That will cost a total of £140. What do you think?'

'Oh, I'll let you know.' Meaning that he'll plod through the *Yellow Pages* until he finds some cowboy who will play ball. He'll end up paying about £60 for the installation plus £50 for the aerial, and the resulting job will most likely comprise a big heavy aerial fixed to a flimsy mast and chimney bracket – to blow down next time there's a gale.

## Time and skill cost money

Many people overestimate the cost of the hardware and underestimate the cost of having it installed. Installers look for a certain gross profit per hour, and part of that profit comes about because we buy aerials and accessories at a much lower

price than they are sold in the DIY shops. So straight away you're wasting money. The DIY chain will take the profit, but obviously they won't use it to offset the installation costs. And their aerials are sold universally, so they aren't tailored for your reception conditions and they are always wideband, which is usually a bad thing.

A good installer will have a wide variety of aerials and accessories in the van. Your choice in the DIY shop is more restricted and, even if the choice was there, you won't know which to pick. A good installer wouldn't know what aerial to use until he's been on your roof with a spectrum analyser.

So if you want to actually install your own aerial you'd be wise to buy it from a knowledgeable local rigger. At least you'll have the right gear. You'll have a busy Saturday and I hope it doesn't end in the local casualty department.

But if you have more sense than to climb about on the roof without safety equipment and training and you decide that someone else is going to do the job, do yourself a favour. Don't try to be clever by buying the aerial yourself ■

## The return of Mr Bozo

Do you remember Mr Bozo, the rigger from Hell, the man of a thousand cock-ups? Following his debut in the October issue, I received many e-mails, mostly from fellow aerial installers. Some were amused, some were incredulous, and some wanted his address so they could go round and lynch him. By popular request then, here's another sample of his work.

As you can see, the mast is about 20ft long, and the aerial is a Televés DAT75, probably the heaviest array on the market. Another TV aerial and an FM radio aerial add to the load. All in all, then, this is quite a substantial installation, needing the very strongest and most reliable fixings. So what was holding this lot on to the wall? Red plastic plugs! You can see two in the inset picture. Luckily, the bottom of the mast has caught on the wall, otherwise the whole thing would have ended up on the deck.

The two wall brackets are much too close together, greatly increasing the leverage on both. The correct way to install something like this would be to use two very heavy-duty brackets at least 1.5metres apart. Each bracket should be fixed to the wall with a minimum of six 10mm x 100mm anchor bolts. The brickwork must be inspected and must be first class. Red plastic plugs, indeed! The mind boggles.



You can't defy the laws of gravity: These two wall brackets are too close together, putting tremendous strain on the whole setup

