

Fastest broadband in the world on trial

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HOMES in Ashford have been chosen to test the fastest public internet speeds in Britain.

Virgin Media has just introduced a 50Mb speed from £35 a month, but is now testing connections of up to 200Mb – four times faster. The company used Ashford to test the 50Mb speed last year, and now between 50 and 100 homes are testing some of the fastest internet connections in the world.

The company uses fibre-optic cables rather than the copper wires used in telephone web connections.

Wideband

Neil Berkett, chief executive officer at Virgin Media, said: "We're really excited to be embarking on this journey of discovery."

"We're at the forefront of innovation and understanding when it comes to ultrafast broadband services and the 200Mb pilot will give us further insight into how true 'wideband' services might be used by consumers."

The current fastest speed in Japan is 160Mb. In the USA it's 101Mb, run by a company called Cablevision for almost £50 a month. There are also 100Mb services in Europe. Virgin said it had been testing its higher speeds in the lab and their introduction represents one more step towards access becoming available to all customers.

The 50Mb speeds took about a year to become widely available after public testing. Virgin Media said the latest pilot scheme would last from six months to a

year. A spokesman confirmed: "It's a pilot at this stage and we cannot commit to a date for a full commercial launch."

The company is charging customers another £50 to install 50Mb modems and routers, but a salesman said: "This may drop as more people take up the service."

So it would be fair to assume Virgin will also charge more to install new equipment for its 200Mb service when and if it becomes commercially available.

At that speed the downloading of high definition films could take minutes rather than hours, and taking part in multiplayer online games will become faster and easier. During the trial customers will also have increased upload speeds of 20Mb.

There are currently no existing wireless routers that can sustain or even reach speeds of 200Mb.

That means the company has been forced to partner with technology companies to develop the right equipment.

Home-office

And high-end computers are also needed to keep up with the speed of the connection.

It has also added 30,600 television customers in the quarter, compared with 45,000 in the previous three months and 37,000 over the same period a year ago.

Its total number of TV customers stands at 3.65 million. The company said a significant part of the pilot involves assessing related in-home technologies.

Additionally, with high-speed broadband powering many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the home-office market, Virgin Media will be looking at ways to develop products and services for this sector through its business division.

Boot camp's call to arms in battle of the bulge

SHE'S been an angel in the morning to her cleaning business customers, but from now on Sharon Smith is a boot camp commandant knocking privates on parade into shape, writes **Nick Hudson**.

But before her conscripts consider deserting, mother-of-one Sharon is offering the ultimate reward to an army of women across the county.

The rules are simple at her new GI Jane Bootcamp: fall in and I'll guarantee you'll shift those unwanted pounds.

"Up will go your confidence, self-esteem and feelgood factor, and down will come the weight and dress size," Sharon told her first intake at Stable Cottages in Hoo.

The holiday homes setting was the perfect pick-me-up for the eight women who braved the inaugural GI Jane week – with Royal Marines Kevin Green and Jimmy Farrell providing extra "motivation".

The boot camp is a week-long, women-only course of high intensity physical exercise, designed by military trainers to kick-start a healthy new way of life.

Up to a dozen women will be asked to do things they never thought possible during the twice-monthly camps, said 42-year-old Sharon, who also runs the Angels cleaning agency in Bexleyheath.

She got the idea for her rejuvenating lifestyle training regime after going on a



GI JANE: Jane Turkington, left, and Roxanne Beaverstock with Kevin Green and Jimmy Farrell. Inset: Demi Moore

similar course in Hereford last year.

She set about planning her own camp, which is named after the movie GI Jane – starring Demi Moore – which tells a fictional story of the first woman to undergo training in the elite US Navy Seals.

Sharon said: "I wanted this to be a different experience for women."

Among her first intake was a real-life Jane. And Jane Turkington proved "nothing is impossible" by shedding 15lbs and one-and-a-half dress sizes. Fellow rookie Roxanne Beaverstock managed to lose 9lbs, one dress size and was "left feeling good about herself".

The action-packed training schedule promises boxing, core training, war games, assault courses, running, power walking, skipping, riding, volleyball, netball and water activities.

"Put in the effort and you will see a significant loss in weight and inches," Sharon said.

"It's not a prison for ladies and no-one will force you to do anything you are uncomfortable doing. But you'll be amazed at what you actually can achieve."

Contact GI Jane Bootcamp on 020 8301 4353 or email info@gijanebootcamp.co.uk.

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