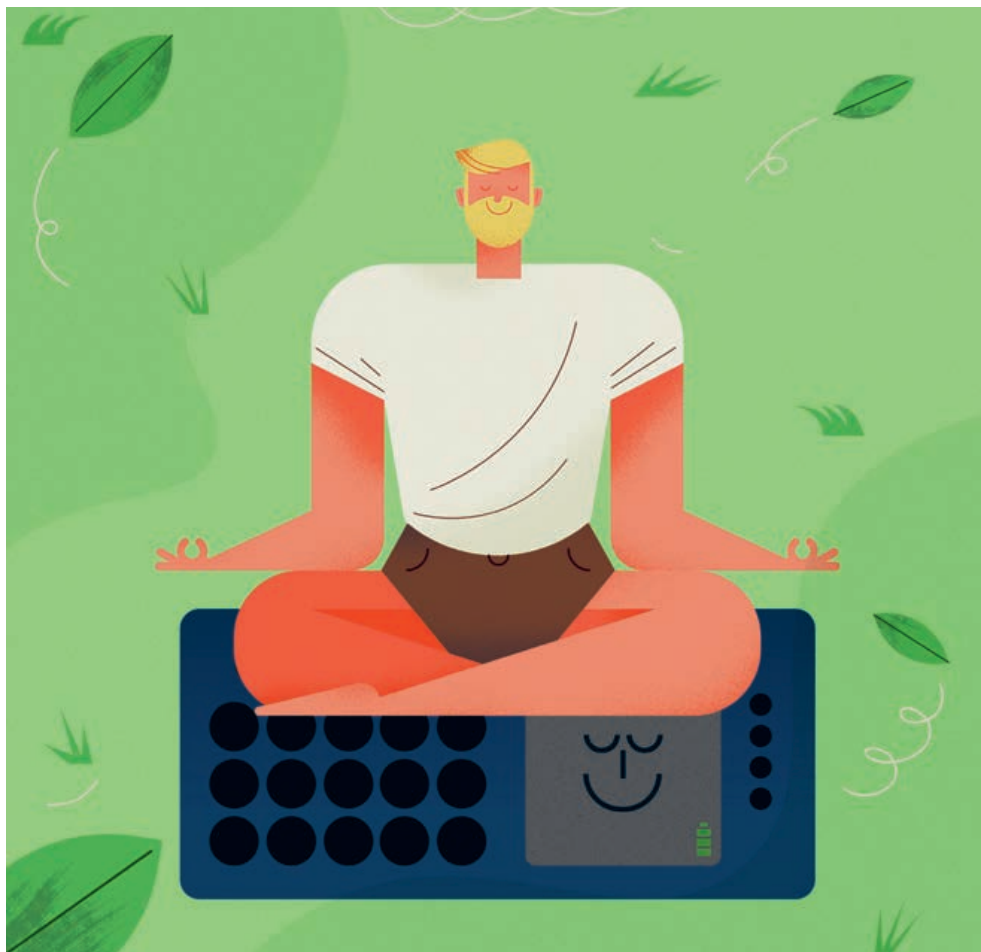


TECH ON TOUR

It's dark. Very dark. The Czech village of Nizbor doesn't have many streetlights and four of us are in a car trying to find our accommodation without a map. Three of the four have no mobile-phone signal.

I'm the one who does, but there's a problem: my phone is the Punkt MP01, a 'dumb' device that's had a digital lobotomy, leaving me with only calls and text messages at my disposal. Why? To improve focus and remove the parade of pixels that constantly divert our attention.

As I'm berated by my colleagues for not having my smartphone, the weak light from a head torch appears out of the darkness. The wearer's a local man with few teeth, but plenty of geographical know-how. He holds up his finger, shouts "Follow!" gets in his car and takes us to our accommodation. It's much faster than using Google and a lot more



"SHOULD WE ALL DITCH OUR DIGITAL TETHERS?"

OUR TECH GURU OLLIE PEART (RELUCTANTLY) TESTS OUT A BACK-TO-BASICS 'DUMB' PHONE AT THE MONGOL RALLY

fun – an experience I would never have had with my smartphone.

I'm in the Czech Republic for the launch of the Mongol Rally, an event that sees 325 teams attempt a 10,000 mile run from Europe across the Mongolian plains in battered cars with engines no bigger than one litre. The philosophy behind it is that we should all ditch our digital tethers and get out into the world in order to experience it unfiltered. With almost a thousand people descending on the area where I'm staying for the start, many of whom have quit their jobs to be here, it seems that sentiment is shared.

This is the perfect place to test the Punkt MP01, I reckon. Like so many others, my smartphone is at the heart of my day-to-day >

life. To run out of battery is bad enough, but to voluntarily ditch it is career suicide. I'm doing you a serious favour testing this thing out, so take heed.

Let's start with the phone itself, which is understated and professional and, at 88g, almost half the weight of the iPhone X. However, it still costs £175, meaning you have to be serious about going dumb to own one. The MP01 runs on the old GSM network too, meaning it won't work in certain countries, but Punkt is launching the MP02 soon, with 4G capability.

I like the #blessed feeling of keeping life simple, but not having WhatsApp means I miss out on lunch plans. The other thing I'm struggling with is the 'twitch'. You know the twitch. You almost certainly have it. It's that feeling of unquenchable thirst for communication and content that has you reaching for your pocket every few minutes. At one point, near the start of the rally, I whip out my phone to take a picture, but can't: it has no camera. Instead, I have to rely on my eyes and brain.

As Punkt says, "Sometimes it's good to take a break," and I do feel more in the moment. Smartphone addiction is a growing concern. A paper published in *Clinical Psychological Science* this year shows a strong correlation between a rise in depressive



SIMPLE TIMES

From above: the 'dumb' Punkt MP01; our writer grapples with map and un-smartphone at the start of the Mongol Rally

symptoms and teen suicides with new-media screen time.

I must confess, my addiction won out. The Punkt MP01 made me aware of my own dependency and usage, but the draw of maps, apps, music, photos and videos proved too strong and I caved, switching my sim back into my smartphone after less than 24 hours.

As the participants of the Mongol Rally made their final preparations before setting off, I was struck by how happy they all were. They'd left behind their modern lives armed with nothing but a map and a horn to conquer the next 10,000 miles of their existence, while I stood in their dust, taking snaps on my iPhone.



SMART NUMBERS

240.3 MILLION

Smartphone users in Europe in 2016

87 MILLION

Facebook users who may have had their data improperly shared as part of the Cambridge Analytica scandal

30 MILLION

People who left Facebook in Europe in 2018

29 MILLION

WhatsApp messages sent every 60 seconds

5 YRS 4 MTHS

Average time spent on social media over a lifetime

3 SECONDS

Time it takes to delete Facebook from your phone