

LIFE ON MARS

INNOVATIONS FROM THE PAST

This week saw the return of time-travelling detective series 'Life on Mars', already becoming a cult classic after just one series. In case you haven't seen the show, the story revolves around 21st century detective Sam Tyler who, following a serious road accident, falls into a coma and finds himself back in the year 1973.

The first series was shown a year ago and proved massively popular, offering intriguing story lines, strong characterisation, humour, pathos, plus a healthy dose of nostalgia thrown in for good measure. The second series – which will be the last - kicked off this week.

The show's producers have gone to considerable lengths to capture the essence of the early 1970s and of course this is part of the attraction – particularly seeing how much things have changed over the years. It's hard to imagine a world without mobile phones, desktop computers, SatNav, DVD players, and digital cameras. But if we take a quick trip back in time, we'll see that 1973 was actually quite a year for innovation...

Ceefax was first introduced as a way to keep TV viewers bang up to date with the latest news and information. For the first time, you could check the football scores as they happened. Ceefax subtitles weren't introduced until 1979.

The first hand-held electronic calculator was introduced, the Sharp EL-8 (also marketed as the Facit 1111). Available in the US, it weighed over 1 pound, had a vacuum fluorescent display, and rechargeable NiCad batteries. It was a costly device though, at \$395.

The first mobile phone call was made by Dr Martin Cooper, a former general manager for the systems division at Motorola. Cooper made the first call on a portable cell phone to his rival, Joel Engel, head of research at Bell Laboratories.

The first VCR video recorder was introduced by Philips in the UK. It was equipped with a crude timer that used rotary dials. At nearly £600, it was expensive and the format barely caught on for home use.

Although the idea of TV Games had been pioneered

in 1949, the 1973 Magnavox Odyssey game system is generally accepted as the first commercially available TV gaming system. It came with removable game cartridges, but sales were lower than expected and it was discontinued shortly after launch.

The first car safety air bags were offered by General Motors in the 1973 model Chevrolet as an option.

The Internet was set up in 1973 by the U.S. Department of Defence as a way to link up the computers of its staff and facilities. Scientists and researchers began to link up with the Net, and as the use of personal computers boomed in the early 1990s, private individuals and businesses began to use it as a quick, inexpensive means of communication. One particular Internet function, the World Wide Web - has been the foundation of much of the Internet's rapid growth...

Some other firsts from 1973:

- BIC introduced the first disposable lighter
- Skylab, the United States' first space station, was launched
- The Sears Tower opens in Chicago
- The first Jetski was manufactured by Kawasaki
- Barcodes were introduced in the US

