

Didn't we have a lovely time the day we went to Clacton

Steve Hill Photography



By Andy Blackwell

As someone with a strong desire to save money on my heating bills, I've applied all of the new building regs to my home. I ripped up floors, crawled through loft spaces, and

ran pipework hither and thither. I created multiple zones, fitted umpteen room stats and loads of thermostatic radiator valves. It was lovely!Then I went on a heat pump course.

We've been on a fair few of these courses, but these days the manufacturers' courses are being replaced with more formal BPEC training, where you gain national recognition and a lovely, shiny, certificate. So, off we headed to Clacton-on-Sea, which was quite exciting, as neither of us had ever been there before. As it turns out it's a bit like Skegness.... but after the apocalypse. I'm not saying Clacton is a dive. Not at all! But it does make Skegness feel like Cannes and it somehow manages to mix the ambience of Gaza with the weather of Aberdeen, although the beach itself is very nice. However, we were there to be educated, so we emptied our pockets, hid our cash in our socks, and set off.

It turned out to be very informative! Things are changing fast in the heat pump world! Air-source has gone from being dubiously 300% efficient, with the small print caveat that it's 21°C outside, to over 500% efficient at 7°C! Most of the initial issues have been dealt with in that they don't spend half their lives in defrost mode anymore, and when they do, they don't behave like a five-bar fire. Some even run at 70°C these days, so you can retain your old radiators. Of course, these higher temperatures mean lower efficiencies, but they do make the transition from gas and oil more realistic.

The bombshell for me was realising that all the hard work I'd done to improve my own central heating system was now null and void. Turns out, the cheapest way to run your central heating is to run it at as low a temperature as possible, and the best way to do this is to just constantly trickle heat into a stable and unchanging central heating system. In short, take all your sophisticated zone controls ... and throw them in the bin!

Gutted, is too small a word for how I felt when I heard this, but facts are facts. Get the temperature



down to 45°C and heat pumps are very, very efficient. Keep your central heating system very simple and, counter intuitive as it may seem, it becomes even more efficient.

Obviously, there are caveats. The big one is insulation; no central heating system will ever be efficient if half of the heat you put in is just flying right back out again. You also have to get used to this new approach of heating your home very slowly, but heating it almost constantly. Finally, they need to be installed properly and serviced regularly if you're ever going to see a reduction in your heating bills.

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