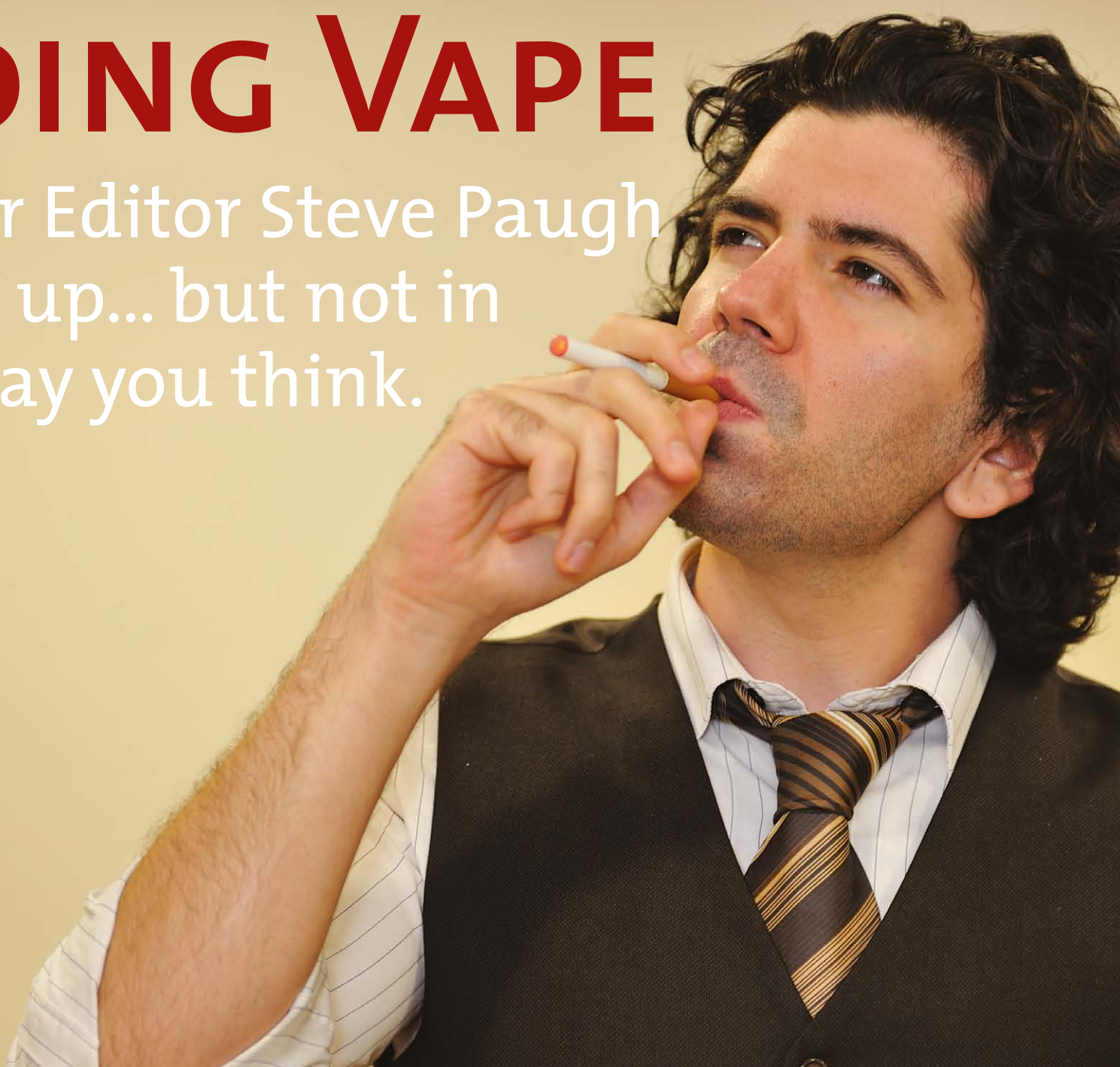


GOING VAPE

Senior Editor Steve Paugh
lights up... but not in
the way you think.



For over 10 years of my life, I have been a smoker; not just any smoker, but one deeply committed to the cause. I was never one of these folks that could light up only in a social setting, or be content with just one or two smokes a day. Call it an addictive personality if you wish, but my motto was always, “I don’t run from death, I face it head on!” Given that quite a few family members have been afflicted with and even died from lung cancer, however, the joke was eventually going to be on me.



>>> At my worst, I was smoking about two packs a day, or about 40 cigarettes (for those non-smokers out there). For a while, I smoked so much that I could have been called “the missing link,” not only because my sometimes Neanderthal appearance makes me look like Lothar of the Hill People, but also because of how much I used to chain smoke. Throughout my addiction, I coughed, wheezed, choked and sputtered throughout most of my daily activities ... and it was beautiful. I loved to smoke. I lived for that stiff little kiss in my chest as I drew in each cottony breath. I savoured each flavourful drag, and revelled in the thick, pursed plume that exploded on every exhale. Yes, my love of cigs was strong and long. And yet, there finally came a day in my life when I realised that I was coughing far more than I was breathing; when every day just hurt more. So, I decided to do the one thing that friends, family members, doctors and after-school specials could never inspire: I decided, for my own sake, to quit.

I'd like to say that I was cooler than the other side of the pillow during the quitting process, but as most people around me can attest, I wasn't what you'd call “exceedingly pleasant.” Most studies agree that it takes 72 hours for nicotine to leave the body, and most smokers will agree that the last gasp on that third day is the toughest. So it was, as I stared depressingly into my bowl of soup on the third night of the rest of my life, that I thought to myself, “There has to be a better way.” Not one who puts much stock in things like patches, gum or cold turkeys, I began researching alternatives. You see, it wasn't that I just missed the feeling of smoking, I missed the act; that tactile nature of just holding the cigarette, the feel of puffing on it and of course, that lovely little donkey kick in the ol' chest cavity. I thought I would never be able to feel these things again after I quit smoking. Thankfully, I was wrong.

Thanks to copious amounts of online research, I came across something called the “Electronic Cigarette” and was instantly intrigued. From what I initially found online and in my tentative inquiries abroad, the E-Cigarette was billed as being cleaner, healthier and, in a word, better than smoking the conventional cigarette. Originally developed and patented in 2003, the E-Cig has gone through many style and operation transformations, but the general premise and functionality remains fundamentally the same. Essentially, the device, regardless of the particular make, is comprised of a rechargeable battery, an atomiser and a small pocket of liquid nicotine solution. These usually come together in an aesthetically pleasing package, most times looking like a regular cigarette. The practice of “vaping,” as the kids are calling it these days, is basically inhaling the vapour that results during the process of taking a drag, which activates the battery, powering the atomiser and vapourising the solution, thus delivering a relatively small dose of nicotine in a cancer-free hit that was reportedly similar to that of a cigarette. Needless to say, I was more than a bit excited, although equally as dubious, about this prospect. Could this steamy substitute really be the answer to my prayers? There was only one way to find out.

To facilitate my curiosity, I decided to get in contact with the good folks over at www.ecigarettedirect.co.uk, which, while being based in the UK, is maintained from right here in Qatar by James Dunworth. I arranged with James to take the E-Cigarette for a test drive, ordering what is called a “Duo Pack” through the website. The package contained the newest model to hit the shelves, the NPRO, which is manufactured by one of the biggest names in the industry, NJOY (www.njoy.com). It contained two batteries (which appear as the white part of the cigarette), a bottle of cartridges (appearing as the brown filters) and a USB/electric socket charger. Before I even took a puff, however, I wanted to know exactly how



“safe” these E-Cigarettes are, just in case I did actually like them. Luckily, James is a walking treasury of knowledge on the subject, and was more than happy to both answer my questions and send any scientific backup needed to bolster his claims. The nicotine solution itself, which, again, is contained in the brown filter end of the cigarette, is perhaps the biggest bone of contention for those worried about health risks. I would soon find out, however, that this concern is basically groundless.

The solution, which has been scientifically tested and analysed not only by companies like NJOY, but also independent researchers, lacks literally all of the hundreds of cancer-causing agents in cigarettes. What it does contain is Propylene Glycol, which may sound villainous, but is actually used in things like fog machines, and, as James told me, was even used for a while to sterilise the air in select children’s hospital wards. Beyond this ingredient, there are certain consumable additives for flavour (of which there are many available, including tobacco, strawberry and coffee) and of course, water. Despite evidence to the contrary, however, there are still some organisations, official bodies, media outlets and even governments that seek to ban the use of E-Cigarettes because of some perceived health risk. It is true that the E-Cig is a new product and that it is still being studied, but what is already clear is that they are over one thousand times better for you than the real thing. Even the amount of nicotine (which most physicians believe may be addictive, but in the small doses delivered by the E-Cig is not overly harmful) varies depending on the strength each smoker craves. This spectrum ranges from High (about the strength of a Marlboro Red) to Zero (about the strength of...well...air). Having heard all of this from James and exploring for myself the scientific research surrounding the issue, most of which can be accessed over the internet and purport the relative safety of the device, I made the rational decision to give the E-Cigarette a go.

I watched while the LED light that simulates the red ember of a burning cigarette glowed in response to my pull on the E-Cig, and as I pulled away and breathed in, I fell in love. There was the kick I had been craving; there was the feeling of something in my hand; there was the “smoke” that danced from my mouth like a frozen whisper. There, friends, was satisfaction. Now, the NPRO is not EXACTLY like a cigarette. It is heavier, does not produce as much smoke and, because it is not disposable, is made of stronger materials that may at first feel strange in your grasp. That said, all of these factors soon become secondary and even imperceptible the more you hold it.

The “Light” variation of the nicotine cartridge I tried first was sweeter than I was used to in the classic smoke, but not in a bad way. It was tastier, less heavy and accomplished that small twinge in my lungs



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without sending me into a breathless coughing fit. Not only that, but it completely quashed any and all cravings for the real thing that I had been grappling with over the past month. Armed with a charge that lasts pretty much the entire day (depending on how many drags you take) and a cartridge that lasts for about 300 draws from a regular cigarette, my NPRO supplied more than enough crave-killing power to get me through even my most dire urges. Added to this is the surprising value of the E-Cig. For two packs of the Duo (one for Managing Editor James McCarthy), plus two bottles filled with the Zero nicotine cartridges, it was altogether about QR 500, which isn’t too bad as I haven’t even vaped half of my cartridge supply. Most sites maintain that, with E-Cigs, heavy smokers like I used to be will save up to QR 16,500 every year by making the switch.

I have been using the E-Cigarette for over two months, and have noticed a marked improvement in my lung capacity during daily physical activities, like going to the gym, as well as what I can only describe as a fierce resistance to picking up regular smoking again. It isn’t perfect, and while still more research is coming in, I, for one, am sold on the E-Cigarette. I am breathing easier, feeling better and neither annoying nor harming everyone around me with my “smoke.” I can take it into elevators, my office, non-smoking restaurants and even airplanes without disturbing the air of anyone around me. So, if you are a smoker, and are looking for a cleaner, healthier and, to be frank, downright cooler way to get your nicotine fix without worrying about “the big C,” this is definitely the way to go.

Vape ‘em if you got ‘em, folks!

