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RURAL CONNECTIONS

A broadband boost or 'corporate welfare'?

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PHOTO: RACHIEL LINGGOLD

The farming centre of Harriston, part of the Town of Minto, in Wellington County, has an odd claim to fame. According to **Ookla Net Metrics**, a U.S. company which tests Internet Service Provider (ISP) speeds through their website (www.speedtest.net), Harriston residents have, on average, access to the fastest Internet service in Canada.

We asked the town of Minto's mayor **David Anderson**, who lives in Harriston, about this and he credits a local telecommunications company, **Wightman Communications**, which installed a fibre optic cable last summer linking Harriston with the town of Palmerston and the village of Clifford.

Harriston's status is one of the things that we discovered while researching a story into getting broadband Internet access across rural Ontario. Every rural resident deserves broadband access, Huron County planner **Carol Lemming** told us, and the feeling appears to be ubiquitous across Ontario. How to get broadband access is more contentious. Our cover story starts on page 12.

Parking yourself on a fibre optic wire is one way to get it, but most farm businesses will make a connection via either a Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) through a telephone company telephone line or a wireless network.

One of the wireless ISPs in north Wellington, near Harriston, is **Everus Communications Inc.**, formerly known as High-Speed FX Communications Inc., which bills itself as the largest wireless Internet provider in Ontario. Its president and Chief Executive Officer is **Richard Cantin** and Wightman Communications is a major competitor. Cantin argues that the Speedtest results aren't a good way to rate a company. He says that speed ultimately depends upon the route taken and the amount of Internet traffic at a given time and the distance.

Cantin goes further, making a comparison between a Mustang and a Porsche in a zero to 60 miles per hour test. The Porsche may get there in 3.8 seconds compared to the Mustang's 5.2 seconds. Ultimately, when the speed limit is 60 miles per hour, does it matter? he asks. The slower Mustang is still "a pretty darn good car."

We asked **Doug Suttles**, founding partner and technical director for Speedtest.net, based in Montana, which performs 600,000 tests per day. He had kindly supplied us with a database of average speeds of ISPs in Ontario. He agreed that distance is an issue.

Suttles told us that Speedtest.net connects with 250 servers worldwide and tests against servers in the area. So a person testing from their computer at home in Harriston might be speed-testing to and from a server in Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, or even Kippen, where **Tuckersmith Communications Co-operative Ltd.** hosts a test server for Speedtest.net. "Some ISPs might argue. Others actually refer to us to show what their speeds are," Suttles told *Better Farming*. **BF**

ROBERT IRWIN & DON STONEMAN

“In Quotes”

“The rural market has been neglected for a long time.”

Barrett Xplornet vice-president Bill Macdonald, explaining why subsidies are necessary to get broadband into rural Ontario.