

Equipment Review

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Garmin GPS V – Personal Navigator

Reviewer: Don Lockhart – BMW Riders of Southern Maine



Maybe it's a "guy thing" but stopping to ask directions is even less fun when you're on a bike with a full-face helmet on. That's when having a GPS makes riding even more enjoyable! It's truly like having your own personal navigator that always knows where the next turn is. My first encounter with a GPS for vehicular navigation was a car trip with the family to visit friends in Virginia who had recently moved there after being neighbors for years. A co-worker loaned me the Delorme Earthmate GPS, which is only a GPS antenna and needs to be hooked to a laptop or a Palmtop PC such as a Palm Pilot. With this unit, you got a CD with Delorme's Street Atlas on it and you plotted your course on the PC, then downloaded the route to your palm pilot or just used the laptop with the CD in it. Anyway, I plotted the course to our friend's house in VA, and even though we'd never been there, it was able to take me to within 50' of their driveway, and informed me of every turn with advanced reminders and then counting down to within feet of when I had to make each turn. I was hooked... Man, was this cool! I picked up my own Earthmate GPS soon after and used it with my palm pilot and occasionally with a laptop pc. The drawbacks of the Delorme system are that it's not self-contained and is reliant on another piece of electronics to provide the brainpower for it. When I got my BMW R80/7, I now had 2 separate things to mount on the bike. It's bad enough trying to mount 1 thing, but I made it work. I installed the Delorme antenna on the "dashboard" of my Luftmeister fairing, and necessity being the mother of invention made a hybrid mount for the Palm Pilot using part of a cell phone mount and an end cap from a vinyl rain gutter. But I had cables running all over the place, and it was very cumbersome to unassemble and lock it in my trunk when I stopped for lunch. It was also very slow in processing power since the Palm pilot runs at about 8Mhz.

After a while it got to be too much of a pain, so I hocked the Delorme Earthmate on EBAY. Someone was actually silly enough to run the auction price up to \$10 more than Delorme was selling them NEW at the time and mine was 2 years old! Their loss... my gain! So I went out last year and bought a Garmin GPS III+. This cured my woes of having many pieces and wires, and reduced it down to one simple unit. It did seem to update faster than the Earthmate/PalmPilot combo did too. But... and it's a big but! It did NOT navigate by road, which I didn't fully understand when I ordered it. It would only navigate by waypoints, and was limited as to how

many waypoints you could have in any route. It also had a very small memory capacity (1.4MB) so it was fairly limited in how much added detail you could download from the Mapsource CD (which you had to buy separately for about \$89). So when I first got it, I was a little disappointed with it. But it did pretty good navigation on routes where you had good waypoints at key intersections. But only a short time after I got it, I started hearing about a new model, the GPS V that was soon due out. I ran with the GPS III+ for the 2001 riding season, but was at a New Years Eve party and my buddy was showing me his new GPS V. I was VERY impressed, as the V seemed to cure all the little woes I had with the III+ and also added a ton of other really cool features. So, was that a long-winded intro to my review or what? It's good to have a little background! I ordered mine in March 2002 from Amazon.com.

The Garmin GPS V is a very feature rich little unit. There are more complex units, ones with color screens, larger screens, or a little voice that will talk to you speaking your next turn instructions, but dollar for dollar, you'll be hard pressed to find a better unit to put on your bike for navigation. The V is a 12 channel parallel receiver, which features automatic present-position-to-address routing and also WAAS accuracy (Wide Area Augmentation System). Okay, so what the heck is WAAS? Basically, it's a system of satellites and ground stations that provide GPS signal corrections, giving you even better position accuracy. How much better? Try an average of up to five times better. A WAAS-capable receiver can give you a position accuracy of better than three meters, 95 percent of the time. With the automatic routing (new with the V) you can input a destination waypoint and the unit will give you turn by turn instructions with audible warnings of upcoming turns and automatic off-course recalculation of a new route! (This feature alone is worth the price of admission to me!) The unit comes with a CitySelect CD, which basically has the whole, or North America on it in detail. You get an "unlock code" to unlock one of 9 regions. You can buy more regions or a master CD unlock (around \$90). The GPS V has about 19MB of memory, which is NOT expandable but should give you plenty of room. The street price is about \$415 delivered as of this writing on 4/11/02. The unit does come with base maps of North America already burned in it, so the maps you download into it add details such as local attractions, restaurants, gas stations, police and emergency services, complete with phone numbers of all. The V also come with a really nice mounting bracket, which has a quick release (it won't take me 5 minutes to break this puppy down when I get off the bike!). It also comes with a 12VDC power cord so you don't need to use the 4AA alkaline batteries on long trips. It has a nice backlight you can turn on at night (another reason to use the power cord!) with adjustable brightness. Battery life (without the backlight on) is rated at about 20 hours. The screen is also the same size as the III+, but much higher resolution 256x160 or 40,960 pixels vs. the III+ at 100x160 or 16,000 pixels of resolution. The external housing is exactly the same, including all the external pushbuttons used to navigate the software menus.

Other new features over the III+ are a pop-up direction screen, which pops up an enlargement of upcoming turns along with the audible reminder. If you knew how to run the GPS III+, you'd have no problems getting used to the V. Another HUGE plus for the V is that in all the windows, ALL the little boxes that display speed, distance to next, altitude, etc etc are totally changeable to any of the useable fields, so you can configure the display exactly as you'd like it! This is really awesome even if you just want to change the order of how things are displayed, you can! It also has several new little frills such as an onboard calendar, a sun and moon phase info screen, a hunting and fishing "best times" chart (based on moon phase I believe), a gas mileage calculator, and even a couple of games you can play if you're bored to death.

In a nutshell, here's how the GPS V differs from the GPS III+:

- 1) Higher resolution screen (40,960 pixels vs. the III+ at 16,000 pixels).
- 2) Automatic address to address routing available using the base map, CitySelect or MetroGuide USA maps.
- 3) No formal TRIP COMPUTER page, but all of the variables by selections on the COMPASS page.
- 4) The V has WAAS augmentation capability.
- 5) The V has an audio BEEP for alarms, messages, and routing alerts.
- 6) The V "times out to operation" and does not require that you press the ENTER key to get operational.
- 7) The V has an alkaline and Lithium battery selection. (Should also have NiMH)
- 8) The V has a proximity waypoint Alarm (with separate waypoint list) and an ANCHOR DRAG alarm.
- 9) The V has waypoint averaging hidden. Go to Position page and press MENU, select Average Location.
- 10) The V has "road lock" (cursor locks to the road even if map and current position differ slightly).
- 11) The V has "navigation by roads" (routes generated by address to address routing using roads instead of being straight lines between waypoints).
- 12) The V has automatic daylight savings time (no automatic time zone selection) for the USA only.
- 13) The V has automatic or prompted off route recalculation capability.
- 14) The V has an area calculating feature as well as a TrackBack feature.
- 15) The V can store longer, more descriptive waypoint names.
- 16) The V comes with CitySelect CD, 12 VDC power cord, and a very nice mounting bracket.

All in all, I'm extremely pleased with my GPS V purchase so far. It was about \$100 more than I paid for my GPS III+, but for that \$100 I got the CitySelect CD with the ability to unlock 1 region (I chose the northeast of course), You also get a VERY nice mounting bracket (I actually ordered 2 more bracket bases at \$11/ea for both cars), and finally you get a 12VDC power cord. All these options purchased separately for the III+ would be well over \$100. The automatic routing means you only have to find your destination or load a waypoint for it, and the GPS will automatically find your way to it for you, using the "Fastest" route or the "Shortest" route (your choice when choosing the destination). I'm sure there are many other great units out there on the market. The 3 mentioned in this review are the ones I'm familiar with, and of those 3, it's no contest that the GPS V is the way to go if you don't like to stop and ask for directions.

Here are a few good resources for GPS information:

<http://www.gpsinformation.net> (great info and reviews on many makes & models)

<http://www.garmin.com> (for info, specs, and support of the Garmin GPS line)

<http://www.gpsnow.com> (information and very competitive pricing)

Ride Safe.

Don Lockhart
BMW Riders of Southern Maine
<http://www.bmwrsn.org>
email: mainuh858@yahoo.com
BMWMOA #91278
BMWRA #27342

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