

by MICHAEL GARFIELD



We Don't Need No Stinkin' Maps!

Back in my Boy Scout days I remember learning to use a compass in case we got lost in the woods. Later in life if directions were needed when driving, I stopped by a gas station to get a map.

As I tell my kids now, oh how things have changed. Fold-out maps are getting scarce and why should we estimate our location with a compass when new technology like Global Positioning System (GPS) can tell us exactly where we are and where we need to be.

GPS is actually a constellation of 24 Earth-orbiting satellites. The U.S. military developed this satellite network as a military navigation system but soon opened it up to everybody else. A GPS receiver's job is to locate four or more of these satellites, figure out the distance to each, and use this information to deduce its own location.

You may be familiar with GPS receivers that are built in several models of new automobiles. A small antenna is mounted on the vehicle and the location is shown on a small dashboard screen. Some systems allow the driver to input addresses or destinations and the system will guide the vehicle to that location.

A standard GPS receiver will trace your path across a map as you move. If you leave your receiver on, it can stay in constant communication with GPS satellites to see how your location is changing. With this information, the receiver can give you several pieces of valuable information like how far you've traveled (odometer), how long you've been traveling and your current speed (speedometer).

Many companies are using GPS devices to make their processes more efficient. Delivery services can track the location of their trucks. Auto dealerships place receivers on new and used cars to locate vehicles in case of theft. Yellow Cab equips all its 1,000+ cars in Houston with GPS units so its dispatch center can pinpoint the nearest cab to a passenger request.

After market GPS devices for driving have been popping up recently. TomTom, based in Amsterdam, launched

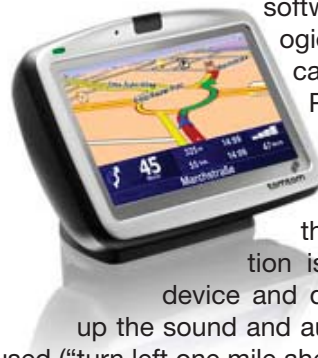
a series of all-in-one navigation systems that have been popular across the world. The GO 910 model (retail \$799) has a 4" LCD touchscreen and sits on an automobile dashboard. Pre-loaded maps are loaded on a built-in hard drive and it can speak in 36 languages.

But this technology is not just for driving. Portable handheld GPS receivers are meant to be used out of the car. Bikers, hikers and scavenger hunters use these light-weight gadgets to not only find where they are going but to see where they have been.

Many handheld models are available from industry leading companies like Garmin and Magellan. Garmin's new GPSMAP 60CSx (retail \$535) has a waterproof, rugged housing making it popular for outdoor and marine use. It comes with a MicroSD card slot so users can load data and transfer routes and waypoints through the unit's USB connection.

Companies are also making GPS services available to portable gadgets by adding a small receiver and mapping software programs. ALK Technologies has a product line specifically for laptops, Smartphones, Pocket PC and the Treo PDA. Using each gadget's Bluetooth connectivity users can place the GPS receiver on their dashboards. The information is wirelessly delivered to the device and displayed on its screen. Turn up the sound and audible directions can even be used ("turn left one mile ahead...").

So put your old compass on eBay and make sure your GPS receiver has a clear view of the sky. You'll never get lost again. Scout's honor.



Michael Garfield is known to millions of radio listeners and TV viewers as "The High-Tech Texan®." He can be heard and seen in many markets dispersing technology news and tips. His weekly radio program can be heard in Houston on TalkRadio 950 KPRC every Saturday at noon. Visit www.hightechtexan.com.