

A smarter GPS

Magellan's new RoadMate iPhone app (\$100, but on sale for \$80) is one of the easiest navigation apps available, and it has the sort of graphics that you usually see on a dash-top GPS unit. Problem is, it costs as much as one.

What makes it easy to use are two features, one called QuickSpell, a good typing recognition program, and SmartCity, which reduces the number of clicks needed to enter a destination.

Another feature you don't normally see on iPhone navigation is highway lane assistance, which uses an arrow to show a driver the correct lane. Live traffic alerts, however, are unavailable.

RoadMate for the iPhone also shows renderings of landmark buildings in a mode called 3-D Plus. It's very helpful, especially for people not good at reading maps.

Like all navigation apps, you also have to put up with a small screen, a slow processor compared with dash-top gadgets and limited battery life. That means you have to get Magellan's optional charging cradle (available next month for \$130). That pushes the price above \$200 — more than most more powerful dash-top units.

Skype via videophone rather than PC: Asus is pitching its new videophone, the Asus Videophone Touch AiGuru SVIT, as a way to make free audio and video calls over Skype, no PC required. But there's a gotcha: While a PC isn't necessary, a broadband Internet connection and preferably a wireless network are.

Setting up the Asus is

simple — just plug in the phone and connect it to your wired or wireless network. I connected to my Wi-Fi network using an on-screen keyboard to enter my security password, then logged into Skype.

The Asus videophone has a 7-inch touch screen with a resolution of 640 by 480 pixels. Its user interface is truly novice-friendly; adding contacts and making phone calls are done with an on-screen keyboard. Call quality was quite good and sounded great on the speakerphone. Video isn't crystal clear, but it's roughly the same quality as from my MacBook Pro.

But is the Asus worth \$255? After all, you can make the same video calls from a laptop. Nonetheless, there is a certain convenience to making video calls without having to sit in front of your computer.

A camera that's svelte but ready for roughhousing:

Casio's first rugged point-and-shoot camera, the Casio Exilim G EX-G1, is a lean model that's strong on tough features.

The \$300 EX-G1 is shock resistant (it can withstand drops of 7 feet), waterproof to a depth of 10 feet, dustproof and freezeproof to 14 degrees.

The 12.1-megapixel EX-G1 has a stainless-steel frame and a fiberglass and polycarbonate body, yet weighs only 5.4 ounces and measures just 0.78-inch thick, making it the slimmest rugged camera on the market. And it's sharp-looking, too, with a chassis and a finish that are vaguely retro-automotive, in your choice of red or black.

The EX-G1, which will come on the market in early

December, has a 2.5-inch LCD that is reinforced to withstand damage from water and drops. Its 3X zoom lens sits behind a waterproof seal. Likewise, a pressure-sealed case protects the battery and MicroSD card.

What's missing? The EX-G1 lacks image stabilization, which seems especially important for people using their

cameras while constantly in motion. And the camera cannot shoot video in high definition; users will have to settle for a more rugged standard image.

Dell is ready to jump into the smartphone market

Confirming long-standing rumors, the PC maker Dell has officially announced its entry into the smartphone market. The company announced last week that it would begin selling its first handset — the Mini 3 — in China through China Mobile by late November. It will go on sale in Brazil through the wireless carrier Claro (part of the America Movil network) by year's end.

The touch-screen phone, which does not have a physical keyboard, will run on the Android operating system from Google. Though the company is largely keeping silent on pricing and specifications, Dell has been boasting that the Mini 3 will have a

3.5-inch high-definition screen and high-quality internal speakers.

No word yet on if or when the Mini 3 will be offered elsewhere, but Dell does hold agreements with Vodafone in Europe, Maxis in Malaysia and AT&T and Verizon in the United States, among others.

— The New York Times

