

GEAR BOX

AFFORDABLE NAVIGATION

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DON KUREK

Why spend big money on a factory navigation system when you can get a portable device for hundreds less? The question is becoming rhetorical. Portable navs may have smaller

screens than the built-in competition, but just try moving that built-in from one car to another. The four nav systems below retail for less than \$230 and have text-to-speech

features that will read street names aloud. They all work just dandy to get you from point A to point B; the biggest differences lie in features, menus, and user-friendliness.



GARMIN nüvi 255W
THE HIGHS
 Fast rerouting, shows speed limits on map, fuel-efficient "ecoRoute" feature.
THE LOWS
 Prompts for a street address before the street name, often long search time for points of interest.
THE VERDICT
 You'll be happy, but maybe not as happy as the guy with the Magellan.
 (\$219.99; 800-800-1020; www.garmin.com)

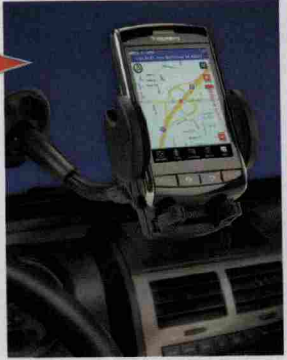
MAGELLAN ROADMATE 1430
THE HIGHS
 Easiest and quickest route programming, comes with free traffic reports for three months.
THE LOWS
 Planning multiple stops is a different function than finding a single destination.
THE VERDICT
 Even your grandpa could figure out how to use this one.
 (\$229.99; 800-707-9971; www.magellangps.com)

ALPINE PND-K3
THE HIGHS
 Works as a Bluetooth speakerphone, plays audio files via an SD card.
THE LOWS
 Menus aren't as good as the best, windshield mount includes a huge docking port.
THE VERDICT
 A solid pick if you like the extra features and don't need traffic info.
 (\$199.95; 800-257-4631; www.alpine-usa.com)

TOMTOM XL 330S
THE HIGHS
 Compact windshield mount, can download fuel prices and locations of red-light cameras (with a connection to a computer).
THE LOWS
 Faint and muddy-sounding speaker, programming takes longer than with other units, traffic info requires a \$100 antenna.
THE VERDICT
 Good for tech-savvy users, but there are better units for simple navigation.
 (\$179.95; 866-486-6866; www.tomtom.com)



AN ALTERNATIVE
 If you have a GPS-enabled mobile phone (excluding the Apple iPhone), TeleNav can turn it into a portable GPS device for \$9.99 a month. We tried it on a BlackBerry Storm and liked the user-friendliness and the constantly updated traffic info. But maps can take a while to load, and they don't load at all without a wireless signal. Most phone screens are tiny compared with those of portable nav units, but the price is attractive.
 (888-353-6284; www.telenav.com)



I SPY
 The Blackline GPS Snitch won't give you directions, but it will tell you where your car, or someone else's, is with up-to-the-minute accuracy. The Snitch also has a motion detector, and you can be alerted via text message or e-mail if your car, or something in it, moves. If cloak-and-dagger isn't your thing, you can share your location with friends. The rechargeable unit lasts up to a week on a full charge, and the service is \$14.99 a month or \$169.99 a year.
 (\$299.99; 403-451-0327; www.blacklinegps.com)

