

Auto GPS Systems

Important Features

- 1. Quantity and quality of maps is critical.** They must be up to date (or updateable) Built-in and detailed road maps of your area of interest are an essential feature of a good automobile GPS receiver. My last update cost \$69 dollars. The ability to upload maps with a USB cable or memory cards is also desirable. Some units have SD card slots.
- 2. I strongly recommend text-to-speech capability.** Instead of just giving an instruction to "turn left at 100 feet," models with text-to-speech can pronounce the street name ("turn left at 100 feet on Main Street"), giving you better information and reducing the need to look at the screen.

Important Features (Continued)

- **3. Make sure the unit you select is capable of being mounted neatly and securely on your dashboard.** Nearly all models come with the proper hardware, but it may be an additional cost accessory with some. Experts point out that you must be able to mount the unit where it won't interfere with airbag deployment. Otherwise, the unit could be blasted into you or a passenger. Note that California does not allow windshield mounting.
- **4. Make sure the screen size is appropriate for your eyesight and vehicle space.** The vast majority of car GPS units have 3.5-inch displays. The newer versions, like the Garmin nuvi 660, have larger 4.3-inch displays.

Important Features (Continued)

- **5. Automatic destination routing is a standard feature on any good car navigation GPS.** Some inexpensive units can only handle point-to-point routing, while more sophisticated auto GPS models can handle multi-segment trips.
- **6. Consider a unit with a large Point Of Interest database (five million or more).** Points of interest range from tourist attractions, hotels and restaurants to gas stations, Starbucks and ATMs.

Important Features (Continued)

- **7. Weigh convenience features.** A touchscreen is common. Many units simplify text entry by only allowing you to type letters or names in the database. As you start to type, these units may also give you options to select.
- **8. Decide if you want to be able to get live traffic reports and alerts.** FM TMC, MSN Direct service, Tele Atlas and Clear Channel have subscription-based live-traffic services. Compatible GPS units use a built-in or external receiver -- or a Bluetooth-compatible phone -- to download this info and incorporate it into routing. Check coverage, however. Each service is only available in a limited, but growing, number of major markets.

Important Features (Continued)

- **9. Evaluate weight and bulk.** If you want to use the unit in two cars or as a portable MP3 player, portability is important. If not, you may still wish to carry the unit to reduce the likelihood of theft. I strongly recommend that you remove and hide the dash unit.

Important Features (Continued)

- **10. Consider multimedia features.** Many units play MP3s and can store photos. Some models play through integrated speakers, while others have an FM transmitter to play through your car stereo. Although wireless FM is not high fidelity, it's satisfactory for car use and the MP3 format. However, some models cannot play music and navigate at the same time.

Summary Recommendations

- Get a 4.3" screen – they're much easier to read and use.
- Get "text to speech" so that street names are called out.
- Garmin and TomTom are the major players with Magellan a distant third.
- Many new cheaper brands (Navigon, etc.) coming to market. Unknown quality at this point.
- These things are amazing and fun to use.