

My very first article for TechTalk in the inaugural issue (November 2005) of CityMasala was on Magellan Roadmate 760. GPS units since, have come a long way and in this article, I have reviewed some of the latest units which don't just show you the way - they can also help dodge traffic. Isn't this perfect for someone in your family who hates to ask for directions while driving? Yes ... Father's Day is around the corner and what better gift than one of these latest GPS units for the big man?

Comments? Write to techtalk@citymasala.com.

Sales of Global Positioning System navigation units, which rely on satellite technology for pin-pointing road location quadrupled in 2007, according to market research firm, NPD Group.

This is in part, thanks to the fact that GPS technology has become more sophisticated and less expensive of late. These days you get quality routing even on the lower end of the \$200-to-\$1000 price spectrum. However, pricier units offer many desirable extras.

The most desirable is the traffic function, which can be added to a higher-end unit for an annual

fee, usually less than \$75. This feature is far from perfect as manufacturers rely on info from nationwide traffic-monitoring services, so the data is only as up to the minute as the services.

Other reasons to consider a top-rung model

- They allow more customization, such as routing for multiple stops or warning you when you're speeding.
- Most offer Bluetooth connectivity, meaning they function as a speaker and receiver for hands-free cell calling.
- Some take verbal commands.

- A few even have travel content.

According to me, the make-or-break factor for any unit is its user-friendliness. Garmin, Magellan and TomTom, have the best reputations in this area. Comfort can be subjective, however. Thus it's worth playing around with the units at a store; even if it's just entering an address. Then, go home and use the comparison shopping tool at pricegrabber.com to find the best price.

Here are 4 GPS units that I've reviewed which have live traffic feeds.

	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	UNIT DRIVABILITY	ROAD TEST	OVERALL
<p>Garmin Nuvi 780 Price: \$550 Bluetooth Connectivity Internal Antenna MP3 player Live Traffic (plus movie listings, gas prices etc) from MSN: \$50 a year</p>		<p>The most intuitive: it limits choices on the screen (clicking a simple WHERE TO? Icon begins the navigation). Plus, it's quick to notice when you've gone off route.</p>	<p>Route – Generally picked the most sensible way. Traffic – It identified plenty of problem spots on the route. Built-in antenna means one less wire to contend with.</p>	<p>A- Garmin is the industry leader and this is why. You get good routes and traffic info in an easy-to-use format.</p>
<p>Magellan Maestro 4250 Price: \$400 Bluetooth connectivity External Antenna AAA travel info Live Traffic from Navteq; \$40 a year Limited Voice Recognition</p>		<p>Easy enough but not nearly as basic as the Garmin—for example, the main menu is on two screens. Voice recognition is nice, but could have been better.</p>	<p>Route – Usually made logical choices. Traffic – Quick to note major jams and gives lots of rerouting options. Antenna plugs in easily to cigarette lighter.</p>	<p>B+ A strong alternative to Garmin, especially for value. The interface isn't as user-friendly, but it does the job.</p>
<p>TomTom GO 920T Price: \$500 Bluetooth connectivity External Antenna Live Traffic from ClearChannel; \$60 a year Full Voice Recognition</p>		<p>Not as user-friendly—the main menu is spread over three screens.</p>	<p>Route – Again, mostly solid choices, and you can get map updates from other users. Traffic – Comparable to other units, but it has an external antenna, which can be a pain to set up.</p>	<p>C Even with working voice recognition, it doesn't compare to Garmin and Magellan.</p>
<p>Navigon 7100 Price: \$400 Bluetooth connectivity External/Internal Antenna Zagat reviews Live Traffic from Clear Channel; free Limited Voice Recognition</p>		<p>Not very easy. The touch screen is difficult to operate and very slow to respond.</p>	<p>Route – Not great. A simple trip had me going every way but the direct one. Traffic – Has an internal antenna, but the external antenna is clunky</p>	<p>D Other than the fact that the unit comes with free traffic info, I couldn't see any reason to buy it.</p>