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Best GPS Solutions

7 Top Global Positioning System (GPS) software solutions

by Myron Swartz

I would like to begin this article by first stating that all the GPS products reviewed will do the job. However, the buyer will have to consider a number of factors, including the attractiveness and readability of the user interface, the ease of operation without having to resort to the manual, the accuracy and flexibility of the routing feature, and more.

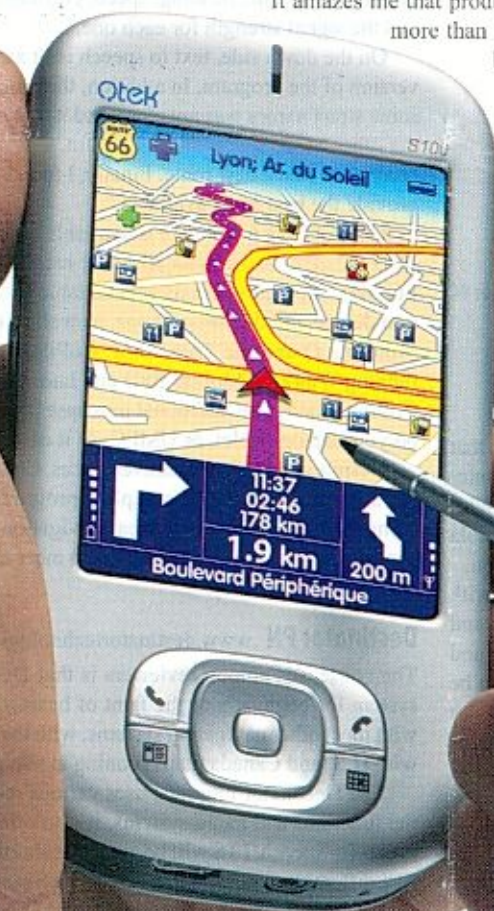
It amazes me that products which were superb last year still keep getting better. In fact more than two of the programs we reviewed are complete rewrites, and all but one now include large graphical buttons and easily identifiable icons, which let you operate the program using your fingertip—and leave the stylus in the slot. In addition, more and more programs are offering live traffic updates for those with phone-enabled Windows Mobile devices.

This article was completed with the able assistance of several reviewers, including Bruce Allgire, William Bressette, Gary Garland, Al Harrington, Tim Hillenbrand, Mordy Mueller, Russ Terrell, Ed Zabrek, and Rey Flores. Their opinions have been incorporated into the reviews and they are quoted throughout the article. A special thanks goes to Denise Deveau for integrating the product descriptions and

the reviewer comments into individual product reviews.

Final note: We tested the Pocket PC versions of these programs. A number of them are also available for the Windows Mobile Smartphone and we indicate this when they are.

Myron Swartz is a retired real estate developer who started programming in the early 60's in Assembler, Cobol, RPG and machine language. He has been using voice guided GPS for over 8 years and has been on the Smartphone & Pocket PC magazine Board of Experts for 3 years.

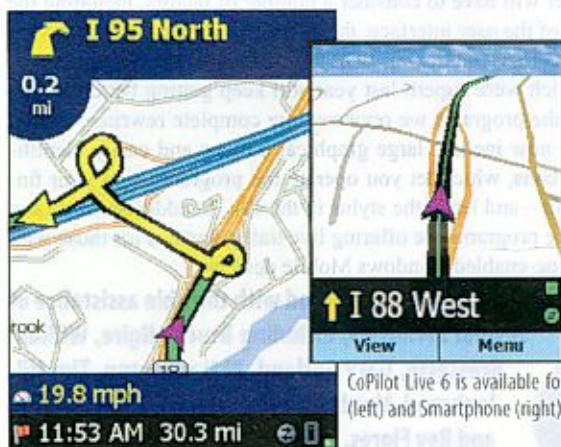


GPS solutions for Windows Mobile devices are definitely improving with age.

Not only have the old standbys enhanced their programs considerably, new players have introduced innovative programs that ensure lively competition and continued fast-paced development in the field.

Today there is a vast selection of very affordable and versatile GPS solutions available for Pocket PCs and Smartphones. Most vendors offer integrated packages that include the GPS software/maps, GPS receivers, as well as power cables and other accessories. You can also buy the GPS receivers and software separately. Although you can mix and match GPS receivers and software, usually the most economical way to pick a GPS solution is to find the software with the features and map coverage you like, and then purchase a GPS receiver supported by the software vendor.

In the following reviews you will find that there is much to commend about most of the solutions. However, GPS users have varying needs and experiences with GPS. When selecting a solution, it's critical to understand your navigation requirements and the level of sophistication you need in a program. You should also pay careful attention to the extra fees charged for additional map coverage, tracking services, and other add-on features. Packages can vary considerably and costs can quickly add up when certain features you wanted weren't included in the purchase price.



CoPilot Live 6 from ALK Technologies www.alk.com

CoPilot Live 6 is a powerful yet easy to use GPS navigation program that includes the latest street maps, advanced customizable routing, route-specific real-time information, and support for the latest Microsoft Windows Mobile 5.0 Pocket PCs and Smartphones (including the Motorola Q). In addition, it supports both TMC and GPRS Traffic information.

The software contains the latest street maps from NAVTEQ, with updated coverage of the U.S., Western Europe, thousands of new and updated Points of Interest, and new coverage of Eastern Europe and Australia. Complete maps of the U.S. and Canada or Europe can be purchased on a single 1 GB storage card (approximately \$100). CoPilot Live's unique borderless door-to-door trip calculation and turn instructions in one's own language makes driving across Europe as simple as driving around Houston.

ALK customers can opt to receive live traffic and notifications about route-specific incidents. CoPilot Live 6 incorporates ALK's unique Live Tracking functionality, which can display driver locations in real-time on a secure Web site. The 3D map display is enhanced with distance-to-turn indicators, scrolling map, and a turn arrow that highlights the way ahead.

CoPilot Live 6 is customizable, letting you avoid or use certain road types, set average road speeds, and create driving profiles for use

at different times of day—such as rush hour—or when driving different vehicles. You can also customize the display to add up to 50 stops along the way (aka, waypoints), show ETA, current time, current road, nearest town, nearest major road, or destination.

Ed Zabrek was impressed with its ease of use, thanks to the clearly labeled menus and the finger touch interface with large menu buttons. You only need to enter in the destination and start driving, and CoPilot Live 6 does the rest. The directions for the complete trip were available in seconds, and the recalculation of a change in direction was instantaneous.

Ed notes, "Downloading Houston mapping software to my HP 4700's 4 GB SanDisk CF card was intuitive and simple. After completing the download process, I went outside and paired up my HP 4700 with the CoPilot Bluetooth GPS receiver and navigated my way through the streets of Houston, Texas, without a misguided turn."

Bruce Allgire was equally impressed right from the start. "I found that the normal time to get a fix was only a matter of seconds. In addition to this, you can see the fix, latitude, longitude, heading, speed, elevation, the number of satellites, and the signal strength for each one.

On the down side, text to speech isn't available on the Smartphone version of the program. In addition, the voice-to-text pronunciation of some street names was not clear, and it took a bit of getting used to. On the other hand, if you do miss a turn, CoPilot needs only a couple of seconds to find a new route. Finally, I found that CoPilot didn't always provide the best route available."

CoPilot Live 6 software is available for \$199.99 (\$299.99 with the 1GB SD card loaded with all of the maps for the U.S. and Canada or Europe). Separate versions are available for the Pocket PC/Phone Edition device and the Smartphone, as well as dedicated products for the Motorola Q and the Treo 700w. CoPilot Live 6 works with devices running Windows Mobile 2003 and later versions of the OS. Note that CoPilot requires an additional purchase if you wish to use the program on your laptop, tablet, or UMPC, so it can get quite pricey.

Despite a few minor inconveniences, CoPilot Live 6 is a great choice for any user requiring a complete program with a simple interface, comprehensive maps, and great navigation capabilities. It's flexible, easy to use, and easily customized to meet individual needs, making it well worth the money.

Destinator PN www.destinatortechologies.com

The consensus among reviewers is that Destinator is definitely not a system for beginners or the faint of heart. Destinator is priced on par with most other navigation systems, with the typical price for programs with U.S. and Canada maps running at about \$124.

The Destinator interface uses various icons on the screen to get to the functions and menu systems. It also offers a single voice selection (Text-To-Speech/TTS will be available shortly). You can enable/disable five different voice prompts (Over the Speed limit!, Route Recalculation, Low Signal, GPS Not Found, and Drive Carefully!).

By default there are three notifications for each turn: 500 yards, 200 yards, and at the turn. This cannot be configured within the application, but for the more advanced user there is an .INF file that can be modified. It also offers four map views (2D day and night, 3D day and night).



The CoPilot Live 6 user interface uses large, clearly labeled buttons.