Purchasing a GPS (checklist)

GPS Equipment:

We have a great relationship with both Magellan and Garmin companies. They send us product to study, use, and abuse, so we can offer our clients the cream of the crop products while suggesting what is right for you and help avoid the lemon or GPS that just doesn't make sense for OFF ROAD on-the-fly use. There used to be many GPS's on the market offering contradictory things, but today most GPS's have the same basic features such as a minimum number of waypoints, routes and tracks the unit holds. There are a few extra features like an electronic compass, altimeter, 2-way radio, LED flashlight or a camera, but first you need to know what other components to consider before selecting these added features for a final decision. Click on ourÂ GPS ComparisonsÂ & ReviewsÂ to read more. Use the ComparisonsÂ information along with the information below to aid in purchasing the right GPS for you. We recommend and offer the GPS's that work well for off-road, dualsport, adventure riding, 4-wheels, and other on the fly outdoor activities at a discount right here on our site (also check out the upload service if you are purchasing!). If for any reason, you are interested in a GPS not seen on our comparison chart or in the info below, email us for advice. We are happy to help.

GPS Purchasing Check List:

Here are a few check list items to consider when purchasing a GPS Unit right for you:

Manufacturer: Unfortunately, we no longer recommend Magellan handhelds.Â The main reason is because of software.Â Garmin's Mapsource and Basecamp are much superior than Magellan's MapSend AND Garmin has more 3rd party software availabilityÂ and GarminÂ is the only manufacturer that allows for detailed 3rd party maps of Baja!Â

Display: The bigger the screen, the more pixels offered, and the better the sunlight screen, the easier it is to 'navigate' safely. There are some awesome GPS's on the market with small screen sizes that just don't pay off when navigating on the fly!Â Garmin's Montana 650/655 series GPSÂ is currently winning on screen sizes at a whopping 4" diagonalÂ but beware of the Garmin Etrex series GPS; it has the smallest screen size as well as some other hazardous features like the 'joy stick' for those navigating at speed.

GPS FACE:Â Surprisingly, the touchscreen on the Montana 650/655Â is easy to useÂ and glove sensitive, so you don't have toÂ peel them off each time you need to use the screen.Â Â My good buddy Walt Koch loves the touchscreen (with gloves on) and says "this is the best sunlight screen to date from Garmin - two thumbs up!".

Color: Color is a novelty item. It's cool looking, but if you don't want to pay for it, this shouldn't make you cry. When color first became available, there were contrast issues in bright sunlight making it hard to see and navigate. The old black & white units have great contrast and are best in glare and direct bright sunlight. With today's newer units, you don't get a choice; they are all color. I wish the color units had a black & white option for bright days, but they don't. So, if you are looking for less expensive unit, black & white is your bonus. For the rest, there will be a little suffering in bright light (the display color 'Ruby' (Garmin) is best in high sunlight).

Data Cable or Computer Interface (allows you to connect the GPS to a computer): Some newer computers don't offer 9-pin serial ports anymore, so make sure you check your computer to make sure it is compatible with the GPS data cable that comes with the GPS you are considering (now all USB). For the archaic, if you do not have a 9pin serial port and want a GPS that only offers this purchase a 9-Pin to USB Conversion Cable.Â If your GPS is 9-pin only, you are in need of an upgrade because since those models..... the technology in the new GPS is well worth the upgrade!!

Routes/Waypoints/Tracks: We used to plead for more internal storage of waypoints. routes and tracklogs, but not anymore.Â Garmin offers a minimum of 4,000 waypoints, 200 routes, and 200 tracklogs that can each hold up to 10,000 bread crumbs!!Â Good luck filling up that bad-boy!Â A common question is: If the unit accepts an SD card, canÂ youÂ save insurmountable tracklogs? You can save many tracklogs to the SD cards, butÂ the SD cardÂ does not allow routes & waypoints to be saved.Â Caution, when you save tracklogs down to the SD card, it allows each tracklog to continue adding bread crumbs to the tracklog.Â Most software doesn't allow for more thanÂ 500, so if you then decide toÂ download

theseÂ tracklogs to software, you have to cut them down into segments of 500 in order to upload them back into your GPS (internal memory) at only 500 points per tracklog or they will truncate (chop outÂ breadcrumbs past 500).Â Â Remember: you cannot upload from your computer software to an SD card (only back to internal memory).

Â

Battery: AA's, L-ion, or NiMH? AA's are easy to find in Baja if needed; if you choose a GPS taking AA's, consider using E2 Lithium AA batteries, which last much longer than regular batteries. L-ion & NiMH are rechargeable, so you will need to carry the charger, but they are light. Check to see what type battery comes with your camera & other electronics; it is nice when they are compatible, but this should not detour your GPS choice. An alternative suggestion to batteries is to hardwire your GPS to your vehicle. This alleviates several issues such as carrying extra batteries, a charger, and the 'Giggle Effect'.Â The Montana 650 series allows for the rechargeable L-ion as well as 3 AA's (I like this cuz you can carry just 3 batteries for safety and recharge as you go if you choose not to hardwire).

Internal maps: Some handheld GPS's offer internal base-maps; typically city maps of the US (Garmin offers the 100K UA map in most units which is nice detail.Â Anything with more detail is too cluttered for a GPS sized screen!). If you plan to use a GPS for the area offered in a basemap, great, if not, you can select one without an internal map. Maps purchased can be loaded to the GPS as long as you have enough internal memory to support the map you bought or if it allows for SD cards; segments can be uploaded to the internal memory from a software program or an SD card (more about this below). You cannot upload internal maps (maps that come with your GPS) to software or an SD card. You can only use this map within the GPS.Â There are twoÂ awesome maps of Baja (mainland/copper canyon too) availableÂ HERE for upload to yourÂ Garmin only GPS.Â Â Â Magellan GPS unfortunately do not have the capability to upload 3rd party maps and this puts them in the backseat to Garmin.

SD Cards: SD cards are tiny data cards typically found behind or alongside the battery compartment that is used a couple of ways. GPS manufacturers offer maps on SD cards so that you can use different maps by changing out the map SD card (often called a 'chip'). Blank SD cards can also be placed in the GPS to store more tracklogs or for maps (can't load routes/waypoints to an SD card). You can use any brand SD card like Scandisk (popular) or other type SD card up to 2Gb in Magellan and other than the Garmin Colorado Series, Garmin units accept up to 4Gb. You can only 'store' tracklogs on the SD card that you plotted using your GPS. In other words, you cannot upload GPS information from the SD card and then view them on a map to follow (storage only).

Memory: Unless you do not plan to use maps other than what comes with your GPS, you need no internal memory. Memory can work in conjunction with an SD card. Some GPS's come without memory, but offer an SD card.Â If you are using maps from an SD card, for instance, you CANNOT also store information to the SD card. SD cards can only do one thing at a time, so you cannot multi-task. In this case, you would want some internal memory so you could upload the section of the map you will be using and then use a blank SD card for storage. If all of this sounds confusing, I recommend having at least 700 MB (GB is larger than MB) of internal memory with the capability of using an SD card (whether or not you choose a unit with an internal map like US 100K already installing in the GPS).Â Tada.

You can also purchase maps come on CD, which upload to Mapsource or Basecamp for Garmin units;Â the E32Â map needsÂ an unlock code (Baja Nav Map does not).Â On your computer (PC or Mac for E32 and only PC for Baja Nav Map),Â you can create routes, draw tracks, and store waypoints on the map and then sendÂ the information back to the GPS for navigation (both maps also upload to your GPS - so cool!Â

SD Card Corruption: You may experience an SD card corruption (when you cant load more maps, but are not using all the memory on the card). To fix this issue and continue using the same SD Card, format the blank SD card from your GPS (formatting the drive solves the problem of corruption). Also, most people do not know this, but you can master reset or reboot your GPS by hitting: Page/enter/power (push all at the same time), which will reset all defaults. This is not recommended unless you are having issues with your GPS.

Electronic Compass: If you plan to use your GPS to mark waypoints in the field and construct routes or follow the Baja GPS Guidebook routes, a very nice asset is an electronic compass. Each time you stop, the compass will continue pointing in the correct direction, whereas without an electronic version, the GPS compass gets lazy, pointing off into another direction once your motion has stopped and the satellite has a difficult time tracking you. This is a great asset, but not a necessity if you are trying to purchase in-expensively.

Altimeter/Thermometer: Knowing your altitude and temperature is purely an optional item seldom missed if you don't have it and pretty cool if you do, so the choice is up to you. It's an 'extra'.

High Sensitivity Receiver:

I have not had any frustration with the last era of non-high sensitivity receivers; however, the new 'high' sensitivity receiver has a noticeable difference. In the car or in a plane, where there are windows, you no longer have to make sure the receiver is in clear view of the sky. In homes or buildings there is also a noticeable difference where you can actually log on inside and use the GPS. Still, inside some buildings with no windows at least nearby, it will lose reception.

Click here to see a Garmin GPS Comparisons and reviews

Click here to get instructions on how to Update your current GPS (ea. 6 months)

SOFTWARE:

Fugawi. Fugawi allows you to scan detailed topographical maps (like Baja topo's that are not available digitally) and place the guidebook or your own personal information on it. You can create routes by clicking on roads, washes or canyons you wish to explore and create routes for uploading to your GPS. Fugawi allows you to store, transfer, edit, and manipulate data on maps or with your GPS. This software is used on your home computer, and then interfaces the GPS. This is the software we have used for collecting and formatting all the routes offered in the "Baja GPS Guidebook Volume 1" and all three Baja GPS Events. For GPS routing and mapping software, We highly recommend FUGAWI SOFTWARE.

Baja Guides:

Baja GPS Guidebooks. Volume 1 (58 routes) & Volume 2 offer amazing and easy to follow GPS routes in Baja, Mexico! Lizard Lady Publications, Inc. published this off-road guide in Dec. 2002 offering dirt bikes, ATV's, and 4-wheels safe and accurate destinations navigated by the GPS. It includes course description charts, point-to-point mileages, waypoints/routes, maps, route ratings, total mileages, gas locations, special tips, and warnings just in the route sections. The rest of the guidebook gives recommendations on how to travel Baja as an off-roader and how to avoid troubles, history, common questions are answered, and there are recommendations on motels, restaurants, and where to get the coldest Negra Modelo at the day's end. Everything an off-roader in Baja needs to know is in the "Baja GPS Guidebooks" and we always have stock.Â Â Volume 3 (mostly new single tracks) is on its way Fall 2013!! Whoohoo!