

To GPS or not to GPS That is the Question

By Steve Short and Wiliferd Lair

Two riders are riding along the same route, but not together. Both have their spouses along and are on a rather long tour. The weather is turning nasty from the looks of the clouds and the wind is picking up.

Don says no problem and turns on the weather band radio. It informs him there is a tornado watch in Humble County and a severe storm warning for Pulsar County until 3 p.m. He asks Mary where they are. She has no idea. He pulls off the road and checks a map. Now what was the last town we went through? Neither of them knows. We are on 46 but the map doesn't make it easy to find the county and not knowing where they are makes it impossible. They ride up the road and stop at a filling station to find out where they are. The answers leave a little to be desired as the attendant knows they are located in Pulsar County, but hasn't any idea what counties are located in which direction. Don pulls out his map again and is now able to locate where they are. He chooses to route himself out of Pulsar County as quickly as possible. Whether he is routing himself into Humble County will have to be determined at another stop. He realizes that he is routing through a major town and hopes there are no traffic tie-ups on his route, which would slow him down a great deal more.

Bill and Donna are riding along and soon note clouds in the distance. There is an audible sound on his headset providing a warning. A quick glance at his GPS tells him there is a weather warning for Humble and Pulsar County. The screen is now a different color for each of these counties. It also shows they are headed north and Humble County is just to his south. They, too, opt to escape Pulsar County to avoid the severe storm headed their way. Bill touches avoid on the GPS. The GPS responds with an audible statement it is recalculating. Then it shows a new route getting them out of Pulsar County by detouring west. He touches weather on the GPS and gets a map with weather symbols. He notes the forecast calls for storms to the east but cloudy to the west. He determines the new route is acceptable and takes it. They too approach a major metropolitan area. The GPS warns of a traffic jam ahead. The screen shows there is an accident ahead and it is listed as a severe delay. The GPS then asks whether to detour around the traffic jam. Bill touches detour on the screen of the GPS. It routes him around the traffic jam. He then touches the music button on the GPS and asks for XM Radio. He then selects Merle Haggard as the performer he wants to hear. The GPS searches the channels and finds a station playing Merle. Donna says she prefers to listen to their pre-recorded MP3 music. Bill touches music again on the screen of the GPS and selects MP3. He then selects the album he wishes to hear. They ride merrily along, listening to their music as they route around the traffic jam. They are fully confident that should any other such emergencies occur down the road, they will be warned and routed to avoid them. They decide they ought to find a motel for the night. They want one on their route in about another 100 miles. Bill touches the appropriate areas of the GPS screen and finds his choices. They agree on one so he touches that selection. A screen comes up with the address and phone number. He touches dial and the GPS dials the number and connects them using his

motorcycle headset via blue tooth with his cell phone that is still in his pocket. They make their reservation then touch go to on the screen. The GPS asks if this is a new final destination or a new via point on the route. Bill touches new via point and the GPS provides directions to the motel. He knows that later he will use the GPS to also find a restaurant.

Both sets of riders will accomplish the same thing. Both will get to their destinations. Unfortunately, Don and Mary were delayed considerably and then have a bit of trepidation about continuing their ride. They are also very dependent on the accuracy of the information they are getting from those they ask. Bill and Donna had no delay except for slowing a little while he manipulated the GPS. They ride with full confidence that they are not riding into another storm and know they can avoid any major traffic jams in the large towns they must go through. They know exactly where they are as their position shows as an icon on the map on the screen of the GPS. Which rider would you rather be???

GPS units have come a long way in a short period of time. My first unit was a Garmin Emap. It showed me where I was at all times on a map. That is so long as I had loaded on the card a relatively small area in which I would be riding. Extra cards helped to overcome that limitation and I thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread. Of course, in those days, a motorcycle mount for the GPS did not exist. A little Velcro on the top of the left fairing pocket took care of that. Now I knew where I was anytime I wanted to look. It was a far cry from the scene described above.

Many units later we are in the age described above. Cost is always a concern. The Zumo 550 is the latest unit the authors own. The price was less than \$750 including shipping and a three-year warranty. The unit came with a motorcycle cradle and an automobile cradle. To use the phone and to be able to get directions through either the intercom or the auxiliary by switch, it was necessary to purchase a wiring setup. The wiring was \$280. The XM radio and the weather require both an antennae (\$250) and a subscription (\$13 per month.) There is no subscription for the GPS service as that comes from the defense satellites. That means we paid \$1,230 for the unit plus \$16 per month. Is it worth it? We paid more than that for the CB radio on our bikes. We use the GPS a lot more often than we do the CB. In addition, if we used a car much, the unit would work just as well in the car. In our case, we were already using an XM radio so the subscription for the weather and traffic was an additional \$3.95 per month.

For us, the safety it represents plus the convenience makes it a no brainer in our situation. YMMV (Your Mileage May Vary).

Any technology readily distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced.