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Navman iCN 550 GPS unit

Should GPS units not only tell you where to go but also help you avoid that bank holiday traffic. We think so and so does Navman. But has the company got it right with its latest GPS offering the iCN 550 with Traffic Pack bolt-on? We get on the road and test it out.

by Stuart Miles published on 21 November 2005

Should GPS units not only tell you where to go but also help you avoid that bank holiday traffic. We think so and so does Navman. But has the company got it right with its latest GPS offering the iCN 550 with Traffic Pack bolt-on? We get on the road and test it out. The next step in GPS is going to be providing traffic information to the driver on the move. With this information you will be able to re-route around accidents and travel hot-spots so you can get home quickly and safely. It is a great idea and one that all the major GPS manufacturers are developing at the moment. Each has its own way of approaching and solving the problem. TomTom for example, offer a traffic service via the 700 series and to access it you have to connect a mobile phone via Bluetooth and dial in. Navman's answer is very different however opting for a radio solution. Bolt on what Navman call the TM550, and the device will happily tell you about any traffic incident in the country as it happens. If one of those incidents happens to be on your journey you can opt to be warned about it or automatically re-routed. Warnings can be based on anything from slow moving traffic to a spot of fog on the road and depending on your own road preferences - i.e., do you prefer motorways to B roads - and the navigation system does a good job of re-routing to avoid the trouble. As if by magic, even on our first test route the unit notified us of slow moving traffic and an accident on our route. Choosing to see what the device meant by slow moving traffic and happy to give up our time for you the Pocket-lint reader, we subsequently sat in a 45 minute



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traffic jam that we could have avoided. The second time this happened we weren't so stupid, and after the warning of the accident opted to accept the re-routing option. But how does the system know that there is trouble ahead? By tuning into its own built-in radio. The good news is that once you buy the iCN550 with the traffic bolt -on there is no further cost. No subscription charges and no hidden stealth taxes like having to phone in for the information. For once a company has launched a product with a lifetime subscription bundled in the initial cost. But it's also where the first major disappointment comes in. As we've mentioned, to work, the system tunes into the radio to get the latest traffic reports - in fact it actually uses the same service that your favourite radio station uses to get its traffic - hence how it can tell you every incident from John O'Groats to Penzance. But achieving all this comes at a price and you have to have a horrible FM aerial strewn across your dashboard and suckered to your windscreen for the service to work. It is certainly not a fetching accessory to that plush car you were hoping to put it in. Furthermore it requires a power source and a tangle of cables to work. In short it's horrible and even in the words of Bud Smith, Global Product Manager at Navman, it is "Not pretty, but then we don't expect this to be for the mainstream consumer". In today's world everything needs to be for the mainstream consumer. I don't want to spend £600 on a GPS system that is going to be difficult or complicated or blatantly looks horrid. I want something that I am not going to have to make excuses for whenever a colleague or friend gets in the car, and I certainly don't want to have to justify to Mrs Pocket-lint that the reason I've covered the car in wires is so we miss the odd traffic jam when we go to the Mother-in-Law's. It just doesn't work like that. Rant aside, the traffic element of the system works very well. Furthermore the actual unit is very easy to use and a vast improvement on Navman's entry model - although at almost twice the price you would hope so. Worthy bits to mention are a 3.5in touch screen colour display, the use of a 4Gb

At a glance

What is it?

Sat Nav with Traffic support

Good

Traffic information on the fly, petrol and parking button, easy to use interface

Bad

Requires your dashboard to be filled with wires, Traffic element an afterthought

Verdict

A perfectly good system only spoilt by the roughness of the design. Unless you're an early adopter this is probably one to steer clear of

Price £600

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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hard drive that comes preloaded with a complete map of Europe pre-installed and the introduction of a petrol and parking button that will tell you where the nearest of both are (independently of course) and if it's the petrol station option you can even have the system add it to the route so you aren't going off the beaten track. The other option we liked was the ability to change the display from 2D to 3D to instructions and more on the press of a button rather than searching deep into the menu system.

VERDICT

With the traffic element, the Navman iCN 550 is a worthy satnav system. Add the traffic element to the offering and whilst expensive in the short run does become a compelling offering if you plan to use this over a couple of years. So why are we more enthused? It comes down to all those wires again. For us the unit not only has to work, but it has to look good doing it, and the iCN550 just doesn't look good when you've got a bunch of cables dangled across your dashboard. Wait 6 months and Navman will hopefully have solved the problems. Until then only mad scientists, early adopters and fans of Back to the Future's DeLorean need only apply.