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Sony NV-U70T GPS receiver

GPS has gone mainstream, but can the company who is famous for its televisions and MP3 players point us in the right direction?

by Stuart Miles published on 26 December 2005

GPS has become so mainstream electronics giant Sony wants a piece of the pie, but can the company who is famous for its televisions and MP3 players point us in the right direction?

Realising the that GPS market in the UK is worth a considerable amount of money, Sony has launched its second range of GPS units in the UK after virtually everyone else. Everyone, including Sony itself decided that the first batch were clumsy, clunky and just not really exciting enough to capture the imagination.

Enter the nav-u range stage left.

The new range has two models in the line-up; the NV-U70T and NV-U50. The two models differ only in the map coverage they offer, and whether or not, you get traffic support to avoid the jams.

For the most part however, the models are the identical offering the same software interface and body. Both sport a large 3.5-inch colour touch-screen that dominates the front of the unit. The design looks more like a miniaturised widescreen television rather than a GPS unit and in keeping with the television appeal, both units feature a two-way speaker and a 1.6 Woofer at the back and tweeter at the front to provide clearer instructions.

While the screen makes a huge difference in your ability to read the information and instructions, the added speakers don't. We didn't notice any real benefit over other units with only one speaker and you still won't be able to hear it over your radio for example.

When it comes to using the unit on the road, the



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NV-U70T is easy to use if not a little complicated to start with. Addresses can be input via the on-screen keyboard and users can search by postcode, city, street or point of interest.

In our tests, the unit struggled with a number of the addresses we tried it with. Using the postcode search the device easily found where we wanted when we only put in half the postcode and then normally denied the address existed if we put in all the characters. SL5 7HQ for example returns no results, while SL5 gets you to where you want to go.

These issues aside, once the address had been found the instructions were very clear and easy to follow. The benefit of the large screen means you can see what is coming up and the unit automatically recalculates on the fly if you venture off the suggested path.

Rather spookily, rather than suggest you've made a mistake and then spend the next 20 seconds re-calculating the route, the nav-u just gets on with it as if it knew you were going to make the change in direction. Our initial perception of this was one of doubt over whether or not it had done anything but a quick glance of the overall route showed everything was okay.

Following hot on the heels of the Navman C550 the NV-U70T also offers access to the Traffic Message Channel to get information and allow dynamic re-routing around heavy traffic.

Rather than approach the solution like Navman, which alerts you to the traffic problem, the Sony unit simply gets on with it. Well that's what we think as for the week we've been driving around with the unit on Dynamic TMC mode we haven't hit a traffic jam but then neither have we been told that one was about.

As said at the beginning, the NV-U50 and NV-U70 differ from the maps they offer. UK Users of the NV-U50 can opt for pre-installed maps of all

At a glance

What is it?

GPS with traffic support

Good

Dual speakers, traffic, large colour touch screen

Bad

Software not the easiest to use, maps on the NV-U50 only go down to Paris

Verdict

Looking like a mini-Sony TV, the NAV-U has a clear screen, good styling and traffic updates, it still doesn't beat the TomTom though

Price £419

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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of the UK and Ireland and the north of France, while Europeans get mainland Europe but no UK coverage.

The fact that the NV-U50 will only get you just past Paris will annoy most people who are looking to use the unit to head to the South of France on holiday and it's certainly something to bear in mind. For that, you'll need the NV-U70T that offers pan-European coverage of 27 countries either pre-installed or on supplied DVD.

VERDICT

This second effort is certainly better than Sony's first attempt. The company's decision to opt for its own software interface rather than simply buying an off the shelf solution also sets it apart from the plethora of units on the market.

In doing so however, the company has taken a big risk that its software efforts are perfect and intuitive. Unfortunately while they are good, they aren't perfect and to get the most out of this you should expect to have some tech savvy about you.

If we had to chose between this and the TomTom range, for us the TomTom still wins. The Sony does give it a good run for its money, and the integrated FM aerial for the TMC data in the cradle rather than the requiring you to drape cables all over your dashboard is streets ahead of Navman's traffic offering.