

<http://www.pocket-lint.com/review/2498/asus-mypal-a696-gps-pda>

Asus MyPal A696 GPS receiver

Can Asus take on satnav?

by Davey Winder published on 28 July 2007

To get geek just for a minute, the Intel XScale 416MHz processor packing 256MB of Flash ROM and 64MB SDRAM memory, a 240 x 320 display with effective anti-glare touch screen and displaying 65,000 colours, Bluetooth 2 and 802.11b+g Wi-Fi, and Windows Mobile 5 make for a pretty average PDA. Especially one costing a couple of hundred quid.

OK it is slim at just 117 x 70.8 x 15.7mm and your pocket will not require steroids as it only weighs 170g, battery included. But a PDA needs more than this to cut it in the hugely competitive mobile device market today, what with the number of smart phones out there giving consumers a tough choice to make.

The ASUS MyPal A696 has chosen the GPS route to differentiation. It's easy to set up, just insert the supplied 512MB SD card and the software installs automatically, adding the maps that you need.

ASUS have opted to couple the SiRF Star III GPS engine to the well proven Destinator 6 satellite navigation software. You get all the usual in-car satnav-enabled PDA extras such as the car charger and gooseneck mount, and that anti-glare screen is effective when driving at stopping the sun wiping out your map just when you need it most.

At 3.5 inches the screen is certainly usable enough, although as with most such devices it is the voice navigation that you will rely on the most. Destinator comes with a slightly Germanic sounding lady by default, which can be rather monotonous.

Not so route entry, thanks to the easy finger input that hooks into a fast search algorithm to auto-complete street names without provocation. The full 7 digit postcode search is not to be sniffed at



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either, nor the huge onscreen keyboard. The mapping engine works well in both 2D and the default 3D modes, refreshing the display without noticeable lag while driving.

ASUS has gone for the slim and sexy market, and while it might just qualify for the former it has to be said that MyPal will not be winning any "hot or not" contests if there are such things devoted to PDAs.

I would rather have sacrificed a little in terms of form factor in order to get better functionality, and by that I mean do away with the hidden internal GPS antenna and replace it with a flip-out external one. During a few hours of driving, especially in built-up areas and remote rural forest roads, it simply gave up and dropped the mapping signal for many seconds at a time. Not good if you manage to miss the turning while waiting for it to catch up again.

Even on the PDA front there were cutbacks, which I didn't approve of, perhaps most strikingly that it runs Windows Mobile 5 and not 6. Considering that at £199 there is considerable competition out there, I would have thought running the very latest pocket OS would be an essential requirement.

Not that Windows Mobile 5 isn't capable of driving the multimedia stuff you might want, and handling the organisational and productivity software, as well as delivering acceptable satnav performance, it's just that I want to feel I am getting the very latest technology when I splash the cash on a gadget, and I am definitely not feeling it with the MyPAI A696.

There is no denying the build quality and PDA/satnav functionality are good, but that might not be good enough to beat off the likes of the mobile phone networks who will sell you a smartphone with GPS satnav built in for the same kind of money.

VERDICT

If you just want in-car satnav then buy a
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At a glance

What is it?

Handheld GPS satnav

Good

Slim device, great anti-glare screen, build quality

Bad

Cursed by being just average at everything

Verdict

Another day, another satnav. Can the MyPal A696 compete with the crowd?

Price £199

Our score

6/10

Your score

9/10

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dedicated unit, if you want convergence and miniaturisation buy a GPS satnav enabled smartphone. Which leaves us wondering who will buy the MyPal A696...