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GPS—What's your experience?

This time around, it's GPS technology and devices that have come under the LD scanner. I remember using GPS for the first time, a Garmin eTrex, way back in 2001. This tiny, yellow handheld device had a 12-channel GPS receiver, used 2 AA batteries, and had a 64 x 128 pixel LCD. There was no way to get maps on it of course, but it could save 500 waypoints in its tiny memory and the batteries were good for about 20 hours! Pretty remarkable for the day. But we've come a long way since then too. Starting on page 22, and going up to page 30, you'll find a whole smorgasbord of GPS devices. Most of them already available in India, and the remaining six slated for launch very soon (get your sneak peeks).

Such was the gamut of products, that we couldn't even cover them all. The number of GPS enabled devices goes up exponentially when you consider that any Windows Mobile PDA, any new Symbian UIQ PDA and any new Series 60 smartphone can be used with an external GPS for turn-by-turn navigation and voice guidance! Coming back to the devices, seven of them have the 'LD Recommended' stamp of approval, which means that you can go out and buy them with your eyes closed.

At one point, I had three GPS devices set up in my car, just to see how different devices with different maps cope with the same roads and the same weather conditions. The first device I used was a Nokia N73 with Nokia Maps and an external Bluetooth GPS from Adapt. This would work in pretty much the same way as a Nokia phone with built-in GPS (like the N95 or N82). While it works well, the unfortunate part about Nokia Maps is that voice-assisted navigation is a subscription-based service. You'll have to pay a hefty sum of Rs 4k a year to use it. (Buying a new N82 or N95 will get you three months of free usage).

The second device was a PND (personal navigation device) from MapmyIndia; the AMAX GP5A. This device had the shortest time to first fix (shortest cold start) and the slickest maps. The third device was the PND from SatGuide; a Mio C230. Just comparing the hardware of the two PNDs, the AMAX was the clear winner. It had a brighter screen (better visibility), could play all sorts of movie files (which the Mio can't) and had a 3.5 mm audio out (which the Mio doesn't), so I could connect it to my car stereo. The Mio C230; to have an MP4 player and to be bound to listen to songs on the tiny built-in speaker is silly. The Mio with 4 city maps costs Rs 13,800. The AMAX with a state map (your choice of state) costs Rs 14,990. Take your pick!