

**NISSAN**



# Portable navigation device Nav One also offers traffic reports

By Edward C. Baig

Given a choice, most of you, I suspect, would do your best to avoid driving at rush hour. Not me. The other day, your intrepid tech columnist not only didn't try to steer clear of bumper-to-bumper New York City-area traffic; I actually dived into a traffic jam on purpose.

I'm not a nutcase. Nor am I moonlighting as a Big Apple cabbie.

Rather, I'm testing Cobra Electronics' Nav One 4500. It's a portable mobile navigation device that uses Global Positioning System satellites to keep you from getting lost. The device is scheduled to hit store shelves this month, though Amazon.com is taking pre-orders.

With mixed results, I've been trying it out in and around New York City, as well as in and near Charleston, S.C. On balance, I'd recommend the unit, though it was far from perfect.

As with previous GPS devices, the Nav One can pretty accurately determine your location and map out a route to where you want to go. It provides maps with street-level detail. A voice announces turn-by-turn driving instructions. It can direct you to



Handout

**Next generation mobile navigation device:** Cobra Electronics believes its Nav One 4500 will change the way people get to work, start a road trip, pick up the kids, soup up their cars or just get around.

medical facilities, restaurants and 7.6 million other points of interest, sorted into about 200 subcategories.

What's different is that Cobra is taking navigation to the next level. In some areas, it can report real-time data on traffic tie-ups and accidents, and it promises to reroute you in a jam. (It comes with a matchbook-size traffic receiver.)

Competitors such as Garmin and TomTom are also adding traffic to GPS units. Garmin sells an optional traffic receiver that plugs into certain portable models; TomTom's traffic solution requires a Bluetooth-capable phone. Another rival, Magellan, has made the traffic feature available in Europe but not yet in the USA. (I

haven't tested these devices.)

You can easily move the Cobra device from car to car; it derives power from the cigarette lighter and mounts with a suction cup against the windshield.

Nav One boasts a nice color screen that was visible even in bright sunshine. When you turn the device on, you get a message found on every GPS unit: a caution about entering routes and making adjustments while driving. You're then taken to a main menu screen, segregated into six menu options: location (where you want to go), interest points, map, address book (where you can store and organize locations), go home and settings.

You can return to this main menu by pressing a button next to the screen. Other buttons raise or lower the volume of the voice that tells you where to turn. Another button lets you hear instructions again.

The Nav One lifts data from an FM radio feed via Clear Channel Radio's Total Traffic Network. With the traffic function turned on, icons signifying trouble spots appear on the touch-screen map.

Suppose there's an icon indicating the road you're on has a prob-

lem. Press that icon, and a message pops up with details. In my travels, I got such messages as "Long Term Roadwork State Rte. 9A" and "Slow Traffic Cross Bronx Expressway, 11.2 miles."

The Nav One isn't cheap; its list price is \$1,100. You also must pay \$60 annually to add the traffic feature, though the first three months are free.

Is it worth it? I set out to determine if traffic was still crawling in locations Nav One reported as trouble spots. And I wanted to see if the Nav One missed other congested areas. Mostly, I wondered if Cobra provided enough of a benefit compared with just listening to traffic reports on the radio. A radio announcer can advise you that the Grand Central Parkway at any given hour is a better bet than the Long Island Expressway.

But the radio announcer doesn't tell you how to get where you're going. That's the beauty of GPS. At times, the Nav One chose roundabout routes. But that's been true with nearly every GPS device I've used. In general, the devices are still worthwhile, and, to its credit, Cobra lets you visually compare routes.

Its traffic reports? Call it a work in progress. The device correctly identified some snags, but it missed others. Clear Channel covers about 70% of the U.S. population in 48 metropolitan areas, but Charleston isn't one of them. In places such as New York where there is coverage, Cobra told me the traffic function is limited to major tollways and freeways.

Guess that's why I received no alerts as I headed into the slow rush-hour traffic on the Queens approach to the 59th Street Bridge.

For a device that's supposed to factor in traffic snags, Cobra sometimes underestimated how long it would take to get to my destination after I plugged in an address. It seemed as if its estimates were based on mileage alone — without considering that crossing the rivers around the city can take extra time. (I've had similar quibbles with Web-based mapping software.)

The good news: Cobra can recalculate a route based on traffic delays. The device will prompt you with a new route option if a traffic incident delays you by a designated amount of time over your estimated time of arrival. (Five minutes is the default.)

But some traffic messages weren't very helpful. On a couple of occasions, I saw an alert referring to "delays up to 10 minutes" on an "unnamed road." Can you imagine a radio announcer getting away with that?

The voice on Nav One referred to certain roads by their number designation rather than their descriptive name. But most locals know Route 25 only by its name, Queens Boulevard.

I was pleased, though, to have the device in South Carolina, an area I'm less familiar with. Nav One navigated me to where I needed to be — most of the time.

Still, Cobra failed to find the address of a relative living in Goose Creek, as well as a couple of other streets in the area. (I had to enter the names of major nearby roads.) And I thought the process of adding and editing addresses was a bit more cumbersome than with other GPS devices I've tried.

The portable plug-and-go Cobra is cheaper than a stationary navigation system and is easy to carry around. It promises to become more helpful, once traffic reports are more comprehensive.

## DISCUSSION

How does the Nav One 4500 differ from older Global Positioning System devices? How is the system able to detect many local traffic jams? How did technology reviewer Edward Baig test the Nav One? Which of its functions need honing? If you were an adult driver with a long commute, would you purchase the system now, later or not at all?

## ACTIVITY

GPS is comprised of 24 satellites that orbit Earth in 12 hour periods. Through research, identify at least three other types of artificial satellites (e.g., communications, weather, etc.) that have had an impact on the average driver. (Suggested sites: Encarta at [encarta.msn.com](http://encarta.msn.com) and The Satellite Site at [www.thetech.org/exhibits/online/satellite](http://www.thetech.org/exhibits/online/satellite).) Next, create a chart that describes how each satellite works, outlines its general uses and explains how it affects drivers. Finally, develop 10 questions based on your chart. Exchange charts and questions with a partner, and answer the set you receive.

### APPLICATIONS

- ✓ comprehension
- ✓ consumer issues
- ✓ graphic organizer
- ✓ peer teaching
- ✓ research
- ✓ technology

STOP