

“the Strike proved rather happier than the rider when coping a bit of rain and mud...”



STRIKE GENIUS MOTORCYCLE GPS \$499

RIDER GUIDER

There are bootloads of satnav devices for the car, but precious few, like this one, that will guide motorcycles off the straight and narrow.

What would we do without those scores of unseen satellites silently circling the globe in low earth orbit? The immense, largely invisible technology of satellite navigation has become somewhat trivialised lately despite its magnitude — do we really need a GPS key fob that will take us (roughly) back to where we parked the car in the local Westfield multistorey, for example? ‘Proper’ GPS products are a different matter. For many travellers, the thought of leaving home without electronic guidance is now nigh unbearable; we are ditching in droves our street directories and traditional maps in favour of GPS guidance displayed with ever-increasing sophistication on a small box suckered to the windscreen — or better, properly dashmounted and integrated with the car’s other electronics systems.

But what about the two-wheel brigade? GPS for motorbikes makes equal sense, yet there’s far less hardware choice and, perhaps as a result, the units usually cost more than their in-car counterparts.

One such design for motorcycles device is the Strike Genius — a device with an 89mm (3.5-inch) screen, loaded with a 2GB SD card containing ‘3D’ Australian and New Zealand maps courtesy of up-to-date versions from WhereIS. The Genius is housed in a tough plastic enclosure that has a bit of an anti-glare hood covering the touchscreen display.

It comes supplied with a raft of motorbike accessories, including suitable mounting gear for placement on the bars or windshield, an FM earphone headset and charger, plus DC and 12V chargers. When in use, the rider’s history can be recorded and the data then downloaded for display with Google Earth.

Performance

To fully test the Strike’s rugged credentials, we opted not for a cosy windshield mount on a roadbike, instead installing ours on a Yamaha XR250 dirt bike — so it was bar-mounted and totally exposed to the elements. The pub at St. Albans, tucked away in the beautiful Hawkesbury Bush west of Sydney, was our initial ride destination, taking in a bit of road and plenty of fire trails, as well as a stretch along the famous convict-built Old Great North Road. Motorbikes are permitted through this terrain, and the Strike quickly and accurately calculated a route. We included a diversion to take us a different (i.e. neither the fastest nor shortest) route, and that too was easily locked and loaded.

The weather gods also assisted our testing by venting their best on our chosen Saturday, promising a soggy day in the saddle, but perfect conditions to find out if the Strike was tough enough.

Not long in, we were fighting our way through some quite serious sloop; it was raining steadily and we were cold, wet and not really having that much fun. At least we weren’t lost — the Strike’s WhereIS maps showed our progress accurately and clearly. Like many units, it suffers a tad from GPS lag, and there was the odd occasion where we missed a turn, thinking we still had say 30 or 40 metres to go. But you soon learn to anticipate this slight indiscretion.

The software is also ‘3D’, but it’s a far cry from the sort of highly detailed graphical maps painted by the current crop of in-car GPS units. On a bike, it’s not all that important to visually mark a building or other landmark — you can’t spend time admiring the pretty images on screen anyway, for rather obvious road safety reasons. As it stands, the software is pretty basic and looks comparatively dated, but it gets the job done — getting you from A to B. So the obvious reason you’d buy a Strike for your bike (rather than an in-car unit) is simply for its ruggedness. In-car devices don’t do rugged, and especially off-road you need the GPS unit to handle the constant hammering it gets from its handlebar-mount vantage point.

As mentioned, our initial ride with the Strike was a particularly wet and cold one, and the Strike proved rather happier than



the rider when coping a bit of rain and mud. The small display (some would prefer 4.3-inches, no doubt) was bright enough (it’s variable) and easy to read. The key elements are displayed, such as street names, distance to turns, speed (which proved very accurate) and time/distance to destination. Coming down Mogo Creek Road, a little-used gravel road that scenically links St. Albans to the upper Hunter Valley, we could almost taste the ploughman’s lunch and beer awaiting at the Settler’s Arms. With 25kms to go the Strike predicted it was going to take around 40 minutes — and sure enough, we rolled up right on the projected time. And because of the foul weather, the lunch/drink queue wasn’t out the door, as is normally the case!

Return leg

For the return leg, we calculated a route following the mighty Hawkesbury River east, and eventually back to the relative civilisa-

tion of NSW’s Central Coast. This stretch of road is a popular bike ride at weekends, and stopping for more refreshments at the tiny river hamlet of Spencer (the self-proclaimed ‘hub of the universe’) we got chatting to a few bikies who were intrigued by the Strike and its performance. One couple were planning a four-week ride over to Perth and back, and had been looking for a suitable GPS, so they had a good fiddle with the Strike — I think we sorted a definite couple of sales from that!

We also gave the FM transmitter a whirl on this leg, using a mate’s helmet equipped with a decent FM intercom and headphones. We liked hearing the audible navigation instructions from ‘Kate’, while the MP3 player is hardly ‘audiophile’ but plays a pleasant enough tune. But it was one or the other — there’s no facility that automatically pauses the music when a voice command comes through.

One other thing we had discovered by this point — it’s virtually impossible to use the touch-screen without removing your clumsy winter gloves.

Conclusion

During subsequent rides, we found the Strike a most welcomed riding companion, especially when covering uncharted territory. It kept a good lock on our local global position, plus it’s simple to use. Conversely, the price of the unit can’t be ignored — \$500 would equip your car with some fancy GPS hardware, while this level of GPS in said car could be had for less. So your additional funds pay for the Strike’s ruggedness and the bike-specific accessories, plus the added comfort of keeping your maps up to date for a while. On the flipside, it’ll also mount in-car, so this is a GPS system for both two and four wheels.

Nic Tatham

THE TECH

Strike Genius Motorcycle GPS
Price: \$499

- Operating System: Windows CE5.0
- Screen size: 3.5-inch (89mm)

- Display Pixels: 320x240 (RGB)
- CPU: ARM9 application processor @ 400MHz
- Text-to-speech: Yes
- Navigation features: Current Speed, Least Use of Freeways, Avoid Tolls, Route Recalculation, Shortest Distance Routing, Quickest Time Routing
- Map modes: 2D, 3D, Day Mode, Night Mode
- Power supply: AC power, battery
- Battery type: Rechargeable (Li-Ion)

- Operating time: Approx 3-4 hours (@50% brightness) without vehicle power
- Colours: Black
- Start-up time: 43 seconds
- Warranty: 12 months
- Contract: Strike
- www.strike.com.au

Robust, weather-proof casing Simple to use Ample motorcycle specific accessories

Relatively basic mapping software Relatively expensive Touch screen not all that glove friendly