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RV Friendly GPS Units



The Global Positioning System or GPS was invented by the U.S. Department of Defense. The cost for GPS research and development was excessive, but the nuclear threat at the time outweighed the cost. Twelve billion dollars later the development and deployment of strategically placed satellites and ground stations made calculating geographical positions with pinpoint accuracy easy.

In 1996 a directive was issued that allowed GPS technology to be used by civilians as well as our military. The rest, as the saying goes, is history. For the past decade and a half we have enjoyed the features and benefits Global Positioning Systems have to offer. You simply punch in an address and like magic the small box guides you to your destination.

GPS technology made finding travel destinations easy for automobile owners, but RV owners still had real-world concerns about using this technology. RVs are longer, taller and heavier than your average automobile, and a GPS designed for automobiles could get the RV owner in some challenging predicaments. Driving or towing an RV can be a white knuckle experience when the GPS leads you to an overpass that is too low, a bridge not rated for the weight or a residential neighborhood with low hanging tree branches.

Several years ago I remember searching for a GPS that was compatible with larger and heavier RVs. That search lead me to a GPS designed for professional truck drivers. It did a good job, but was still missing features RV owners would like to have in a GPS unit. Eventually I started seeing some GPS units designed specifically for use with RVs and decided it was time to upgrade my truck driving GPS model. Having some experience with non-RV GPS models there were some specific features and benefits I wanted in an RV GPS.

My RV GPS Criteria:

- 1) A screen display large enough to see while traveling down the road.
- 2) A non-glare screen. Lots of GPS displays are difficult to see because of the glare on the screen.

- 3) The option to select settings for an RV or for everyday automobile use.
- 4) A GPS that can be updated with current map data. I have owned GPS units that were basically worthless in a couple of years because you could not update the system with current data.
- 5) A GPS with RV specific tools like Points of Interest, RV campground locator, warnings, hazards and restrictions, RV friendly exits and RV trip planning features.

With my list of criteria the search was on for a GPS unit designed with RVs in mind. I quickly discovered several very reputable GPS manufacturers who offered GPS units with RV features.

Magellan offers the RoadMate GPS for RVs. The RoadMate comes available in several models offering various levels of RV and truck related features. The features I like include:

- 1) A 7-inch touch screen display
- 2) Free lifetime map and traffic alert updates
- 3) The Good Sam Club Trailer Life directory. This directory is a great resource for the RV owner.
- 4) Customizable truck/RV routes
- 5) Bluetooth enabled, turns your GPS into a hands-free speaker phone.
- 6) Turn by turn spoken directions
- 7) RV campground information and RV POIs.

Prices for the Magellan RoadMate range from \$349.99-\$429.99

Garmin offers several dezl GPS models with varying RV/truck related features. These Garmin GPS models are billed as truck and RV GPS units. Features I like on the Garmin RV/Truck GPS include:

- 1) Lifetime map and traffic updates
- 2) Trucking routes for the lower 48 states and Canada
- 3) Extensive exit services and POI listing
- 4) Customizable main menus
- 5) Bluetooth enabled
- 6) Spoken street names.
- 7) Lane assist with Junction View
- 8) Turn by turn directions

Garmin is currently taking pre-orders on a new dezl 760MT GPS model loaded with great features including a large 7-inch touch screen. The 760MT will be released on December 31, 2012

Prices for Garmin truck/RV GPS models range from \$249.99-\$399.99

As my research continued I discovered that Rand McNally was the first to actually launch a GPS device designed specifically for RVs. It started with the RVND 5510 & RVND 7710 RV GPS models, and I discovered Rand McNally just released a new and improved RVND 7720LM RV GPS unit. At first glance this new GPS met all of my criteria and more. It is evident this GPS was designed with RVers in mind.

Rand McNally offers the RVND 5510 & 7710 RV models and the brand new RVND 7720LM

RV GPS model. The features I like are:

- 1) The large 7-inch screen that adjusts for low and strong light.
 - 2) The unit lets you choose from 11 different RV types, and can be switched to car mode for everyday use too.
 - 3) Lifetime map updates using the Rand McNally dock software portal for PC and Mac users.
 - 4) Routes based on legal and physical restrictions, such as low bridges and roads with weight limits
 - 5) Packed with RV specific tools like Junction View with lane assist, warnings for speed limit changes and other potential hazards, Exits Quick View featuring RV parking and amenities available at exits, RV maintenance logs, and RV safety checklists featuring pre-departure and campground set up checks. It also offers a quick planner to calculate time, distance and cost for trips, pet-friendly locations and there is an address book.
 - 6) Wi-Fi connectivity, enabling transmission and display of weather and other real-time information. This includes current and forecasted weather information for your current location, your destination, and anywhere along your route. The live map overlays display other important information for RV owners like wind speed and precipitation. All of these weather related features are important when making RV travel plan decisions.
 - 7) A fuel log so you can track your fuel purchases, including where it was purchased, gallons and total cost and it can be organized by date or state.
 - 8) A video input that can be used to connect to a back-up or rear view camera.
 - 9) Trip planning features include trip content featuring images and videos, multi-stop trip planning, millions of POIs including RV services, dump station location, thousands of RV parks and campgrounds, Woodall campground information and text to speech descriptions as you drive.
 - 10) Rand McNally Editor's Picks, including Best of the Road® 3-4-day adventures, regional trips, scenic tours, weekend getaways
- Prices for RVND RV GPS models range from \$149.99-\$349.99.

After researching some of the RV GPS models available, and based on my experience and criteria, I was sold on the new Rand McNally RVND 7720LM unit. The only thing left was to do was put it to a real world test.

The first thing I noticed and liked about this GPS unit was the brighter screen. It was really easy to see and can be adjusted for various light conditions. I liked the customized RV setting too. You simply choose the type of RV you have and the length, height and weight. Your best trip route is selected based on the information you provide, and on Rand McNally proprietary information. I always stress to others the importance of making safety checks before leaving on a trip, so the RV checklist feature helps make sure nothing is overlooked or forgotten. You can even make your own checklists.

The Exits Quick View feature made it easy to find things like fuel and places to eat along the way. Something else I always talk to other RV owners about is being aware of the current weather conditions when you are traveling in your RV. I particularly like the real time weather information feature. It not only gives current weather information for where you are, but along your route too. And you can monitor wind speed, an important consideration for RV travelers.

It was a breeze to locate our campground and I had the option to search for certain campground

amenities we were looking for or needed. The rest of test drive went great with the new GPS unit. I really like the RVND 7720 GPS. I haven't even scratched the surface when it come to features on this GPS, and can't wait to check out more during our upcoming RV travels.

Regardless of the GPS unit you decide on the good news is there are finally some real RV GPS units to choose from. Do your research and decide which GPS best suits your specific needs and then head to your favorite KOA using your new GPS. You never know, if you ask for one now maybe Santa will have it waiting for you under the tree on Christmas morning.

Happy RV Learning!

Mark Polk
[RV Education 101](#)