

KNOWLEDGE VERSUS SAT NAV

by Sandie Goodwin and Bob Fisher

Many taxi drivers are already using satellite navigation systems. There is some debate in the taxi trade about the use of sat nav; passengers do not expect to see sat nav being used by a driver who has the Knowledge. There are some in the trade who believe that if passengers see taxi drivers using sat nav systems it will blur the edges between them and the minicab trade. But many passengers do not realise exactly which areas KoL covers; for drivers who get an out of town trip, the sat nav can be invaluable. Sat nav has had a bad press recently but this is mainly because of the “funny” stories that have emerged of people following the sat nav without using their common sense at the same time. The majority of drivers of a car would not drive into a ford just because the sat nav tells them that is the route, nor would most lorry or bus drivers go under a low bridge.

PRICE OF PORTABLE SYSTEMS

Nomadic sat navs, ie portable sat navs, are common place and price is falling. Tele Atlas, the UK’s biggest supplier of digital mapping information to the sat-nav industry, say its popularity will increase. At a recent seminar called “Driven to Distraction” held by the Royal Institute of Navigation, David Last their President, said it is now 29 years since the original sat nav was launched and today people love it. With the technology set to improve further, with greater reliability and more features. Portable navigation unit sales are rising the fastest – from 2.3 million sales in 2004 to an expected 18 million this year and a predicted 30 million by 2009. The seminar was an interesting event which looked at the future of sat nav as well as how it is being used today.

VODAFONE AND TOMTOM TEAM UP

Vodafone UK has recently confirmed it is to team up with TomTom to create a new driver information service. Under the agreement TomTom will share its sat nav technology advances with the data solutions expertise of Vodafone. This project could be operational as early as next year. Tim Stone, director of new business development and wholesale at Vodafone UK, has described it as “innovative” and “exciting”. “Thanks to the quality of our data, UK drivers will soon be able to access up-to-the-minute traffic updates that will let them plan and navigate the fastest route for all their journeys,” he explained. Harold Goddijn, chief executive officer at TomTom, commented: “This important development is a major breakthrough in mobility management and route guidance and will significantly benefit our customers. This will clearly improve the daily travel experience of our UK users.”

DRIVERS STILL USING OUT OF DATE MAPS

Trafficmaster recently published the results of a study into the popularity of direction-finding devices – more than one in five UK motorists now have a sat nav unit. Philip Hale, spokesman at Trafficmaster, reminds owners that they could be misdirected by their sat navs unless they buy regular upgrades. At the same time, results showed 138,000 drivers are still using road maps that were published before the creation of the UK’s first motorway in the 1950’s. “We are all driving further than ever before and on regularly congested roads so, to find the best route, you need to know all your options,” he explained. “Outdated maps are at best unhelpful and at worst distracting and dangerous to follow.”

Looking to the future, features which could be added to sat nav systems include parking facilities at your



destination and whether there are spaces in the car park and alerts to tell drivers when the speed limit has changed as they drive along a particular road. Many drivers have got speeding fines when driving through an area which drops from 40mph to 30mph. It could also be possible for local authorities to express preferences to the mapping suppliers to avoid certain routes through their towns, for example hospitals or schools.

DESIRABILITY LEADS TO THEFTS

One of the problems of nomadic systems is their desirability – sat nav theft is on the increase. The systems are easy to steal and sell on and have replaced mobile theft as they have become more popular. The suppliers are looking at the possibilities of making the systems more secure by using PIN numbers, but one thing is certain, whichever manufacturer brings out a secure sat nav will have the edge on their competition. Another possibility is multi part units, in a similar way to when car radios were given front-off panels to help protect owners against theft.

Needs and wants are not the same when it comes to buying sat nav systems. There is a growing demand for real time downloads and updates but the main things users are looking for are systems which are easy to use. This includes forward planning of routes, which is a way in which sat navs can help with reducing pollution. Sat navs which are reliable also save time for drivers. From a safety point of view, there is divided opinion, but sat navs can help drivers as they do not need to follow complicated road signage and get distracted by signposts. Most problems with sat nav can be attributed to driver error, lack of context (for example when entering a town such as Newport, where there is more than one in different counties) not reading the operating instruction manual and out of date information.

SAT NAV IN THE PH INDUSTRY

It would seem that motorists are gaining benefits from sat nav and for the taxi trade there are times when the systems are useful. So far in all the head to head tests between a taxi driver using his Knowledge and a private hire driver using his sat nav, the taxi driver has won. This proves the point that sat nav is an aid to drivers, but as the two trades are fiercely competitive particularly within the corporate market place, the private hire trade will continue to market themselves with sat nav systems in place to ensure passengers get to their destinations. As the market develops and the technology advances, we could see the time difference between sat navs and the KoL taxi driver eroded.

