

# WORLDLYGOODS

A SOURCEBOOK TO THE UNIQUE AND EXTRAORDINARY



## Once Lost, Now Found

*A novice recounts his journey to GPS bliss.* BY WILLIAM GRIMES

It almost seemed like an afterthought. After a flurry of signing, declining, and waiving, I was turning to leave the National car rental desk at Frankfurt Airport when the agent slid a CD case across the counter. She made meaningful eye contact, as though to say, "This is your mission should you choose to accept it." Little did I know that this was my passport to the automotive future: a Global Positioning System.

Sure, GPS is old news to other people, but I drive a six-year-old stick-shift Honda. To me, an FM radio is high-tech.

Using a printout from MapQuest, my wife, a highly experienced and sorely tested navigator, steered us out of the parking lot, at which point the instructions were so ambiguous we ended up hopelessly lost before we'd even exited the airport. Abandoning that plan, I inserted the CD. A brightly colored map appeared on a small screen

just above the radio, and a firm but soothing voice—female and British—said, “If possible, make a U-turn.” At last: certainty. Following her directives, we soon found ourselves... back at the lot. Whoever had last programmed the GPS, I realized, had been taking the car back to the airport.

For the next two days Miss Money Penny, as I began to think of her, urged us back to Frankfurt Airport. No matter how many buttons I pressed, she was hell-bent on returning there. Despair set in. Over and over I read the same infuriatingly opaque directions, to no avail. And then chance intervened.

I can't explain how it happened. I only know that by randomly poking at the screen, I found the secret combination that caused a keyboard to appear, inviting me to type in a destination. At that moment I entered the promised land.

Provided with a new address, Miss Money Penny sprang to life, easing us out of our hotel driveway, through the intricacies of

downtown Frankfurt, and onward to Munich. At the same time, the map showed us our progress, indicating precisely how many feet remained before the next turn and illustrating quite clearly even the most complex intersections. For the first time

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in decades of foreign driving, I knew with absolute confidence I could not get lost.

Miss Money Penny seemed to have almost supernatural powers. Once—as we meandered through the countryside near Weimar, off our scheduled route—her mildly insistent voice suggested an upcoming U-turn opportunity, just 200 yards ahead on a desolate stretch skirting a forest. Perplexed, I looked into the distance but saw no side roads. Then suddenly there it was: a tiny semicircle of asphalt curving around a picnic table.

The hair on the back of my neck rose. I peered into the screen. What else did Miss

Money Penny know? How many euros I had in my pocket? Would she brew cappuccino on demand?

There were a few occasions when Miss Money Penny seemed to lose it. Once, out of the blue, she began ordering U-turns when, I swear, the car was cruising straight as an arrow to its proper destination. We never figured that one out. Stress? Well, no wonder.

It was hard not to bond with the voice—so competent, so understanding, so gentle. When Miss Money Penny fell silent, as she did on the autobahn, it felt like a rebuff. The strain was intolerable. Then an intersection would heave into sight and the relationship resumed its old footing.

Never again will I drive abroad without GPS. Farewell forever to the long era of deciphering maps, squinting at road signs in the dark, and bickering nonstop over who blew that turn.

Now that I think about it, it might be sort of boring.

**Expert Guidance**

Never get lost. That's the promise of the Global Positioning System, which uses a network of satellites to pinpoint one's location anywhere on the planet. GPS receivers have quickly become standard equipment in cars; now more and more handheld models are available, and the technology is being incorporated into cell phones and other portable devices.

**TOMTOM GO 930**

For driving, TomTom's latest GPS car receiver is the most sophisticated navigational tool yet. It understands voice prompts, makes route



recommendations based on recent traffic activity (instead of on posted speed limits), functions in tunnels, and provides lane guidance to help drivers navigate complex intersections. It also

allows for an **advanced level of customization**: Drivers can update maps on their own or check the Map Share feature to benefit from other users' tips. In addition, they can record their own driving instructions and select a favorite car to use as an onscreen icon. \$500; [tomtom.com](http://tomtom.com)



**NOKIA 6210 NAVIGATOR**

Debuting later this summer, Nokia's 6210 Navigator mobile phone points the way not just to one's destination but also to the **future of cellular technology**. Its maps, stored on a 1 GB microSD memory card, are geared toward pedestrians—although they can be modified for car use. A compass and acceler-

ometer maintain correct orientation no matter which way the Navigator is turned, and local points of interest are highlighted. The phone also comes with more standard features, such as a camera, FM radio, and MP3 player. \$470; [nokia.com](http://nokia.com)

**GARMIN COLORADO**

Garmin created the handheld Colorado GPS receiver **for the great outdoors**.



The basic version—users can load their own selection of maps—but also three specifically targeted versions: One, for hikers, shows topographic details to make climbing (or circumventing) mountains easier; a second, for anglers, emphasizes river and lake information; and a third, for boaters who want to explore coast-

lines, provides local depth charts. All come with a compass, a barometric altimeter, temperature reading, and an SD card slot. \$500–\$600; [garmin.com](http://garmin.com)

**SPOT SATELLITE MESSENGER**

In remote corners of the world, where lack of cell phone coverage can impede calls for help, this gadget could be a lifesaver. The 7.37-ounce waterproof device can send GPS coordinates and short messages via satellite to a traveler's loved ones. **In an emergency**, SPOT acts like a beacon until aid arrives. It also records one's position over time so trips can be plotted and replayed on Google Maps. \$170; annual service, \$100; [findmespot.com](http://findmespot.com)



**SONY IMAGE TRACKER**

If it was Tuesday, must have been Brussels—or was it Bruges? When a trip involves multiple destinations, identifying where a photograph was taken can be a challenge the memory. Sony's two-ounce, 5-inch cylindrical Image Tracker **eliminates the guesswork** by constantly updating one's position via GPS signals. The software then synchronizes the location with the camera's clock. \$150; [style.com](http://style.com)



—FRANK VIZARD