

Plug and go with Thales £1,000 GPS system

SATELLITE navigation systems are a fast growing category of new toys for gadget-loving drivers. Thales Navigation has just announced its top-of-the-range version, the Magellan RoadMate 700.

This claims to be the first plug 'n' drive GPS system, and comes pre-loaded with detailed maps for 17 European countries. Cheaper PDA based devices require users to download the necessary maps.

The RoadMate 700 has a 3in colour screen, and maps can be moved with the touch of a finger. Its memory will accept up to 100 addresses, and it will guide you to your destination with audible turn-by-turn instructions Thales says the device is accurate to within three metres.

Its database includes 750,000 places of interest, such as hotels, restaurants, petrol stations and monuments. The journey-planning options enable you to select your route by shortest time, shortest distance or least use of motorways.

Thales is clearly aiming to attract the serious travelling professional as well as keen "road warriors". Even so, price may be an issue. The RoadMate 700 is expected to cost just under £1,000 when it goes on sale here in May. In contrast, Halfords is selling Medion's PDA based system for only £400, a price that includes a memory card with UK maps.

Thales insists that RoadMate 700 is competitive because it avoids the cos and hassle of downloading maps. Its purpose built controls also make it easier to use than the typical PDA. Later this year Thales will add a traffic information service for RoadMate users.

RATING ★★★★★