

Do-it-yourself GPS

Choosing and Installing a GPS Unit

by Ross Robertson photos by the author

Many of our grandfathers or fathers first used bleach bottles with a tire weight or lined up trees and different shoreline houses to find their way around the lake. Years later, technology gave us Loran C, which were basically radio towers that sent signals back and forth to pinpoint your location. All of the above had issues for one reason or another. Today's GPS units have become more accurate, easier to use and in most cases more bang for your buck.

A GPS unit on your boat will make you a better angler by allowing you to quickly return to fishing hotspots or get back to the dock safely. Several things need to be considered in order to keep from being overwhelmed by the massive tackle shop displays that resemble the walls of televisions at electronic stores.

Color factor

You have the choice between monochrome (black and white) or color screens, with color costing more. Color allows for better viewing in direct sunlight and shows much better contrast when viewing the optional mapping

features. Navigational chips offer the ability to highlight depth areas in different colors. This is a great way to stay out of prop wrecking shallow water or stay in the depth of water you are catching fish in.

Size

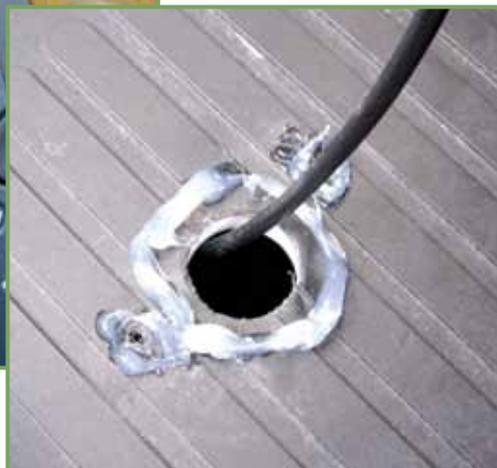
Just like a television, the bigger you go, the more they cost. An important factor to keep in mind is that things become much tougher to view and clearly read when bouncing around in the lake. Getting the biggest screen you can afford is the best piece of advice, especially if you choose a unit that is capable of running in split screen mode.

Card reader slot

Most units now offer a card reader slot. This is very important, because it allows the unit to quickly and easily accept updates from the manufacturer. This will allow you to get constant improvements and eliminate any software problems that may occur. This also allows you to save and



Marking cables with colored tape at each end can help keep them organized and makes diagnosing problems much faster. Zip ties or plastic tubing keeps cords organized and more cosmetically pleasing.



Putting a liberal layer of pure silicon around the holes for the GPS receiver will ensure that water stays out of the compartments and wiring below the deck.

transfer waypoints from one unit to another or load them onto a desktop as a backup. Another added bonus is that an aftermarket navigational chip can be used.

Mapping

Perhaps the biggest advancement in GPS units is the ability to have digital mapping instead of a blank screen with your track lines. This allows you to see in great detail items such as buoys, depth contours, islands and reefs. After purchasing a SD card for the region or lake you are going to fish, you have detail that will take a lifetime to learn. At the same time, this feature allows you to get home easier and with your prop in one piece. Some higher end units have packages that come pre-loaded with maps that have incredible detail.

Bells and whistles

Different manufacturers offer different bells and whistles. Some may fit your personal needs and help you catch more fish or navigate easier. Much in the same way that we only use a fraction of our cell phones features, we only use a fraction of a GPS's capability. Don't pay for things that you won't use.

One unique feature that Humminbird offers is a bird's eye view. This basically allows you to see an overhead view of the mapping, which is very helpful when trying to navigate on a body of water with a lot of islands or tight river bends.

Installation thoughts

The installation itself on a GPS unit is very simple in most instances but still requires some thought before ripping the box open and drilling holes. GPS units require a power cable and a GPS antenna. The supplied power cable can

be powered directly to power at the console or run with an extension directly to the main cranking battery. By bypassing the boats power panel and wiring directly, you can eliminate potential problems. If an issue arises, you can eliminate the boats complicated wiring and only have a few things to troubleshoot. Make sure to follow the manufacturer's recommendations and fuse the power cord, in most cases this involves a 3-amp inline fuse.

The GPS receiver is critical, and the installation will vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, as some require power to the module itself. Some units have internal antennas and require no additional installation. Many professional anglers still prefer to use an external antenna for several reasons. Placing an external antenna will allow you to be more accurate. In a 20-foot bass boat, placing the antenna on the bow or stern could cause you to be off by 20 feet from what you think you are marking. While this may not seem like much, it is when trying to pinpoint small isolated pieces of structure. An external antenna also allows an angler to get better or continuous reception that a hard top or windshield in a boat can hamper.

Knowing what features are important and finding a unit that is easy for you to use is extremely important. Take advantage of online resources and large displays at sporting goods stores to find out what works best for your needs. ☐