

## OnCourse Navigator 4 **NEW!**

By Jake Richards(JakeRich)

Review Team

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**Developer/Vendor:** Unit provided by OnCourse Navigator 4 (  
<http://www.OnCourseNavigator.com> )

**Price:** US\$179.95 List/Discounts and trade in prices may be available

**Rating** (out of 5):



Navigon has been a major mapping/routing player in Europe for some time. Now they have come to the US and Canada through OnCourse Navigator 4, a customized version for the US. The software is powerful, with a unique interface and some unique functions. OCN is clearly an instant leader in the GPS/Navigation community.

### Testing Environment

Axim X50 and X50v with 1 Gbyte SD card, 1 Gbyte CF Card, WM 2003SE installed. Software was tested with Haicom 303MMF CF GPS, SysOnCFMemory GPS w/256k Mem, Delorme Bluelogger BT GPS.

## Review

### Installation

Installation of OnCourseNavigator was very easy. You insert the first (of four) CDROMs into your drive, start Setup and follow the directions. The installation process will add a desktop application for map management and the mapping/routing application to the PPC via Activesync.

After installation you have to activate the software by going to the OnCourse website and entering two keys—the software key and the key generated by your PPC. In return you get an activation key that activates the software. This copy protection scheme is becoming more popular because it locks that software to that PPC. If you get a replacement PPC for any reason, you will have to contact OnCourse about getting a new registration.

Once the software is installed you install the maps you want. The desktop software is pretty intuitive in use. It comes with 8 pre-defined regions including one for Hawaii and one for Canada. These regions range in size from 4 Meg (Hawaii) to 200 Meg (Central US). In addition to the pre-defined regions, you can define your own region. This map cutting process takes a while, but is one of the more powerful tools you can have. I did create a map that included parts of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey that was about 200 by 200 miles square. The map came out to be 56 Mbytes. You can also cut maps for routes anywhere the maps go. I planned out a map from Washington, DC, to Oak Harbor, Washington, with 6 miles corridor width. The resulting route was 2852 Miles, 42 hours and took 18.5 megabytes. According to OnCourse Navigator, the only limitation on the customized maps is that the maximum size you can download is 150 Megabytes. That limit is a restriction from NavTeq. The pre-cut maps are larger, but have been pre-arranged with NavTeq. The sum of all the regions is larger than a gigabyte, so they won't fit

on a 1Gig card. However, the pre-cut maps also contain some duplicated states, so if you have a 1 Gig card and want to do some custom cutting, you can create your own regional maps to remove the duplicates and it should fit, according to the OnCourse Navigator rep with whom I spoke.

You can transfer the maps by Activesync or card reader. On the desktop you can zoom in and move around the maps with full detail. Using this approach you can review the custom cut maps, both rectangles and routes, to make sure you got what you wanted before transferring them to the card.

### **Operation**

I am not going to include a lot of screenshots for this review because there is an excellent demonstration at <http://www.OnCourseNavigator.com>

that shows pretty much all of the functions of the software. I strongly encourage you go there and try the demo. It includes the voice commands so you can even hear how it works. What you see in that demo is what you get. I will include some links to that demo in appropriate spots in the review.

There are some things to note about the operation of the software. The software has a long delay when starting up. On my two PPCs it took about 25 seconds before the obligatory legal warning comes up. The delay is variable depending on the size of the map it is opening and your location on that map. From that point it was quicker to operate.

You can configure the system to use just about any GPS. I was successful with both CF and Bluetooth GPS receivers. The BT was particularly useful, as all I had to do was turn on the GPS, activate BT on the Axim and then fire up the software. It found the GPS and opened the communications automatically.

Routing was quickly done and you get a progress meter to show how the routing is progressing. As soon as the route is complete the system shifts to display the map and start the voice commands.

### **Link**

OnCourseNavigator has all the usual bells and whistles: POI, detours, multiple waypoints, stored locations, fastest/shortest routing. In addition it has some unique features:

Voice activated routing – The most unique feature is the voice activated routing. When you store a location, you get the option to store a voice tag for that location. If you choose to store a voice tag, the system will issue a tone after which you state the tag. When it has classified the tag, the system tones again and you are ready to go. To use the voice, you tap an icon on the routing screen, wait for the tone, speak the tag and if it finds a match, routing starts automatically when a GPS fix is available. I found this function to be very flexible and usable. It was relatively tolerant of external noise. I recorded the tags in a quiet area, then used it in a noisy car with the radio playing. It worked perfectly every time. Depending on your car noise level, your success may vary, but this is a nice "hands off" function.

### Link

For POI you get three choices – Nearby, Of Superregional Significance and In Another City. These make sense and help to hone in the search. For Routing, you get a third choice – Pedestrian. The Pedestrian mode ignores the traffic restrictions (one way, etc) and simply plots the most direct route from where you are to wherever you want to go. If you pair this function with the save location function you get a very interesting function. Imagine this: you go somewhere in a strange city and park your car. Tap and hold the map for where you are when you park the car, then store that location on the PPC. Go visit and walk wherever you want to go. When you are ready to return to the car, start OCN, recall that saved location as the destination and choose the pedestrian map. Voila! A speaking guide back to your car! I don't think this will work in a huge parking lot because when I tried tap and hold it defaulted to the nearest road. Nevertheless, if you are visiting a city, using a rental car and are concerned about finding it again, this function is certainly useful!

Autozoom is selectable – you can make a choice of how fast you want the zoom to activate. I found that High fit my personal choices best, but there is also Low, Standard and No Autozoom.

Trip Logbook – The system will generate a logbook for you that can be either automatic or manually started. Automatic logging begins a trip as soon as the GPS gets a fix.

Unique Keyboard -- The keyboard is in the form of the standard telephone keyboard and is very intuitive to use. I found it was actually faster than the standard QWERTY keyboard.

The software is VGA aware and works well in VGA. It also works well in landscape, but you need to select landscape first and then start the software. If you reverse that sequence, the software does not adjust properly to the change in aspect ratio.

The voice is clear and concise. You get three pre-maneuver prompts and one post-maneuver prompt. The three pre-maneuver are "Prepare to -maneuver-," "Please -maneuver- in xxx feet," and "Now, please -maneuver-." The post maneuver prompt is "Please continue for x miles." Occasionally the post maneuver prompt is not presented if the next turn is close. Similarly, the software will skip the Prepare prompt, if necessary. It never skips the "Now..." command.

### Link

The software is generally accurate and the maps are typical of NavTeq. I did find one strange route and have reported it to OnCourse for examination, but in general it finds the "right" route. In fact, on one particular test route I use it found the preferred solution much sooner than most of the software I have tested there. It never gave really bizarre routes, and if you were to follow it even on the few less than optimum routes it suggested the net would be that you would arrive at your destination with little trouble and little added time or distance.

The software does require a lot of taps to operate. The keyboard requires tapping to choose the letters. The modular design means that you have to tap to go from one module to another. Lots of taps. On the other hand, the voice function meant that I could go to my recorded destination with one tap to start, one to acknowledge the legal warning and one to activate the voice input. If I were to go on a long journey I

would voice record as many intermediate stops as I could so that I could navigate without the taps when driving. You could also use the voice tags to mark multiple customers in a city you were planning to visit and then you could go from one to another with very few taps.

The voice prompts come often and sometimes unexpectedly. I started calling the voice "Chatty Cathy" because of how often she speaks. I eventually learned to tune her out and use the voice just as a prompt to glance at the screen to see where the green route line was showing me to go. The voice prompts were never fully wrong, but sometimes wonderfully strange. She prompted me to take the exit left, when in fact the exit was to the right and what she was trying to say was to continue on the main highway. The problem, it turns out, is in the database. It defines the main road as an exit and the exit as another exit, so no matter what you do you get the prompt to take an exit. But if you simply follow the green line, you get where you want to go. She is very polite, saying "Please" instead of just issuing a command. That is a nice touch.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this is a nice application, with all of the typical bells and whistles and some unique features that set it apart.

### **Pros:**

- Quick routing/operations
- Relatively Easy Installation
- Voice Activated Routing
- Powerful map cutting capability
- Maps take up less space than other applications
- Well designed POI integration
- Landscape and VGA work well

### **Cons:**

- Slow Start
- Lots of taps required
- Lots of voice prompts