

Delorme Earthmate PN-60w GPS ●●●●○

review by Scott Rousseau

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM (GPS) devices have become so popular in our society that only the most extreme Luddites still shun them in favor of the good old-fashioned paper map. Those late technology adopters would have to carry a trailer full of maps to equal even a small portion of the information contained in even the most basic GPS units on the market. On the other hand, beyond the usefulness of their considerable navigation and trip computing abilities, GPS units have not changed all that much since they became commonplace. With its Earthmate PN-60w handheld GPS, however, Delorme has teamed with SPOT to introduce a major breakthrough, and if you're an off-road or adventure rider who takes pride in seeking the most deserted, out-of-the-way back routes, the Earthmate PN-60w could be a life-saver.

The Earthmate PN-60w is designed to link wirelessly with the increasingly popular SPOT global tracking device, and a SPOT satellite communicator is included in the PN-60w kit. The communicator features a clip that allows it to be hung on a belt or a backpack strap, and it requires a subscription to SPOT's Basic Service with Track Progress (\$150 per year), but the service allows friends and family to keep tabs on you virtually anywhere in the world you may be (SPOT's satellite coverage isn't 100%) you are by tracking your route on Googlemaps. It's also invaluable if you should get injured or fall into other distress. Simply pressing the SOS button on the side of the communicator alerts authorities at the GEOS Rescue Coordination Center to send help.

But where the Earthmate PN-60w is really unique is that it also allows you to send customized emails from the GPS device through the communicator so that you can give updates on your situation, whether or not you need of assistance. Your message is quickly relayed through SPOT tracking satellites orbiting the globe, an added measure of security if you should happen to be out of cell phone range—and most off-roaders and adventure riders know cell service can be nonexistent in the back country. You can also post your text messages on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. SPOT already offers a communicator that allows you to link a cell phone to its satellites as well, but most cell phones are still dependent on cell service for their GPS to function properly. Connected to Delorme's satellite network, the Earthmate PN-60w ensures consistent, predictive GPS service that's accurate to +/- 7'.

Delorme claims that the Earthmate PN-60w delivers next-generation GPS capabilities, and it certainly offers a host of functions. Many of them are the same found on most current GPS units, such as route tracking, the ability to mark waypoints and monitor trip data such as time, distance and rate of travel. However, the Earthmate PN-60w also features aerial imagery displays of your position, allowing you to zoom in to see a photo of the area at a height of 40' above your position or zoom all the way out to 640' above it. You can zoom beyond both ranges, but the aerial photo will revert back to the map-style display. Delorme also includes its Topo North America desktop software and GPS map CD-ROMs, which can be loaded via PC onto the Earthmate PN-60w to provide extremely comprehensive detail, including info and elevation profiles for each segment of the globe covered on that particular CD. Aerial imagery, nautical charts, and supplemental USGS and Canada topo

maps are also available. There is so much data on the CDs that the Earthmate PN-60w's 3.5 GB hard drive fills up quickly, so we were only able to download the topo maps for California and Mexico. But the unit's memory is expandable to 32 GB via an SD card slot located in the compartment that holds its two AA batteries (the SPOT communicator also requires two AA batteries, and Delorme includes Lithium AA batteries for both units).

The Earthmate PN-60w and SPOT communicator are extremely compact and light weight. The GPS measures 5 3/8" long x 2 3/8" wide x 1 7/16" and weighs 6.5 oz., while the SPOT communicator is about half as long and weighs 4.9 oz., making them easy to store in a tank bag or backpack. The units are also waterproof, so their function won't be fouled by weather or if you should happen to go for an unscheduled swim.

The Earthmate PN-60w comes with a substantial user manual that outlines all of its various functions and a quick start-up guide to help you get it connected, but once powered up, the functions are fairly intuitive. The unit's onscreen menu is pretty straightforward,

and the interface with its buttons is easy even with a gloved hand. Its TFT screen is readable even in sunlight, but the size of the screen was our biggest complaint about the unit. With an area measuring only 1 3/8" horizontally and 1 3/4" vertically, we found it hard to read in map mode, and we were constantly jockeying with the zoom buttons to find a satisfactory map size. Zooming in to read such details as street names left too little viewing area of our surroundings, while zooming out eliminates the street names. We also tested it while out trail riding on US Forestry roads in Southern California, and while the Delorme software provided accurate mapping of the roads, the screen size once again hampered our ability to plot a course through the mountains. Switching to the aerial view helped, but overall, we'd have to say that the Earthmate PN-60w isn't the most motorcyclist friendly GPS available. It certainly packs all the features found on most motorcycle-specific GPS units (except for voice directions), but it also has a lot of features a motorcyclist simply doesn't need, and its tiny screen can be frustrating to deal with. If we were Delorme and we were serious about tackling the off-road motorcycle market, we'd build a larger, mountable GPS unit with at least twice the screen area.

But there's no denying that the Earthmate PN-60w is a very capable GPS system. Its SPOT tracking and communication features are welcome additions to the market, and it's nice that these breakthroughs don't break the bank. The Earthmate PN-60w retails for a reasonable \$449.95 and includes the GPS with 3.5 GB internal flash memory, SPOT satellite communicator, Delorme Topo North America 9.0 software, a user manual, a quick start guide, four Energizer Ultimate Lithium AA batteries, a USB data-transfer cable for PC-GPS data exchanges, five regional discs of pre-cut PN-Series maps, two lanyards and a certificate for \$40 worth of aerial imagery or other sample supplementary data downloads. The same package is available with a 16 GB internal memory for \$699.95.

We rate its features, technology and rugged construction as excellent, but its small screen only rates as fair. However, the unit is still good enough to rate a solid four out of five, making it a very good value, especially for off-roaders. ■

Delorme Earthmate PN-60w—\$449.95; Delorme, Two Delorme Dr., P.O. Box 298, Yarmouth, ME 04096; 800-561-5105; Fax, 207-846-7051; www.delorme.com

