Having 'Jill' tell me where to go

Ted Brown

Last week, I added one more gadget to my technical toy arsenal. It's a GPS unit.

For those who aren't hip with the lingo, that refers to a Global Positioning System device in my car that tells me exactly where I am in the world, at any given moment by using satellite signals.

It shows the roads I'm driving on, the speed I'm going, estimated time of arrival (ETA) at my destination, and even the closest hotels, restaurants, service centres and all sorts of other cool things.

Co-worker and good friend Kevin, always on a quest to deflate and downplay any of my latest toys, was quick to remain true to form.

"But I know where I am at any given time," he argued, "I'm right here."

I countered that my GPS gives me the ability to find 'places', but Kevin was quick to come back with "That's what 'she' (his wife) is supposed to do," he said, "It keeps her quiet when she's occupied reading the map, while I do the driving."

When I suggested I could use it to return to his family cottage by having him simply give me the address, Kevin once again replied with, "Hell, I don't know the address, I just know when we go down 'such and such' road, we turn right at the old restaurant that's not there anymore...."

It's not much fun arguing with Kevin.

Undaunted, I was still experiencing that little bubble of excitement as I programmed several addresses into the 'Favorites' section of my GPS.

And talk about perfect timing— The Sidekick and I attended an out-of-town wedding last weekend. It was the supreme test.

When it was time to leave home for points unknown, I pressed the onscreen favorites button and was told exactly where to go, with explicit instructions given by 'Jill', one of many voices that are available in the unit.

(One co-worker wasn't too interested in GPS units until I told her she could set it to have some guy with an Australian accent give her 'explicit instructions.' Rushing out to buy one, I fear she may have misunderstood me.)

Setting out Saturday morning, the GPS said we'd arrive at our destination at 11:46 a.m. As we arrived, I was just a tad disappointed— it was 11:49.

After the wedding, finding the reception hall was a piece of cake with 'Jill' directing me. Located in a residential area, the route wound through a subdivision with lots of turns. Using a map to find our way would have been hell, as we drove along a dozen little streets before arriving.

On one street, the GPS sounded an alarm. Looking down, it said there was a 'speed camera' in the school area ahead. Immediately, I looked at my speedometer, and found I was 5 kph over the 40 kph speed limit. I dropped back a bit.

The same with red light cameras— if there's one ahead, it alerts you, making one more attentive of the next stop lights.

Recently I discussed the pros and cons of GPS units with a guy I met. He explained how he uses his for vacations, taking it along whenever he and his wife leave their hotel, even on foot. They set the hotel as 'Home' and when it's time to return after an afternoon of shopping, it tells them exactly what route to take to return to the comfort of their temporary 'home away from home.'

Yup, it's a cool toy, but is also quite useful.

And as far as finding Kevin's family cottage?

Oh, that's simple. I just located it on Google Earth, recorded the latitude and longitude coordinates and input them into the GPS.

Armed with that info, Jill will find her way.

And she doesn't even need to watch for 'the old restaurant that's not there anymore'...

Perfect guy

Aaron Sawczak, a Grade 8 graduate from Georgetown District Christian School recently participated in the GAUSS Math Contest at the University of Waterloo where he was the only student to achieve a perfect score— out of the entire province. More than 900 Grade 8 students in Christian schools across the province participated in the University of Waterloo sponsored GAUSS Math Contest. At Georgetown District Christian School, 22 students also wrote the hour long test. When the results were tabulated, the local school had the top average score out of the 53 schools competing.

Photo by Ted Brown