GL1800 Sat Navs

I often hear complaints about the GL1800 Sat Nav, especially the early models, from 2006 to 2010, because of their limitations and the lack of manufacturers support provided by HONDA and Garmin alike. In my view, the GL1800 Sat Nav is a little gem. It is perfectly situated in-front of the rider making it easily visible whilst riding. It integrates information from the bike systems and presents on a nice big screen that is readable in sunlight (okay it does need a sunshade in bright sunlight). The controls are nicely integrated into the bike so that you can use the system whilst on the move and with minimum disruption to your riding. So, before you start strapping a Zumo to your handlebar, think about updating your built-in Sat Nav and getting the best from it.

First Generation (Gen I)

The first Generation (Gen I) of Sat Nav was introduced to the GL1800 in 2006 and continued to be installed up to around 2010. The Gen I is easily identified by the single 2 GB (Gigabyte) Compact Flash (CF) card used to store the map. The card can be found inserted in the Sat Nav processor in the boot of the bike. The Sat Nav hardware is based on a Garmin Navi and the system represents a collaborative effort between Garmin and Honda to place an integrated system into your bike. The Sat Nav screen displays not just mapping information but also provides on-screen data for your Audio, Suspension, Head Light- leveller and other functions. Therefore, the system is both Garmin and Honda and it means that updates to the original Navi software needed to be adapted by Honda to work on your bike. This is the reason that only Honda (after they have adapted software) can supply updates to your system. Unfortunately, as technology moved on, Honda did not consider the investment in maintaining updates to the Gen I Sat Nav to be cost effective and so most bikes of this era are still running with out-dated maps and software.
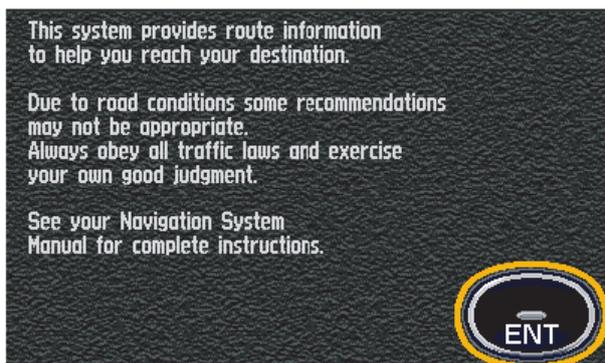
Software Updates. Around 2009, Garmin changed their mapping system to provide more detail and 3D views; City Navigator maps were rebranded as City Navigator NT. This meant that the new maps could no longer be read by the original Navi system. Fortunately, HONDA once again got together with Garmin to produce final software updates for Gen I

that would allow the system to read NT maps. For a UK bike, the Software Version runs in the 2 series, so if you open the **MENU/ Setup/Info, Info/System** Screen you will find the Software Version 2.x and your unit ID as well as the name of your currently installed map. You will need Software Version 2.6 installed in order to read the new NT maps; if the version is lower than this, seek help from a specialist for the updated software.   For a US 'Gen I' bike your Software Version runs in the 4.x series and you will need at least version 4.5 to read NT maps.

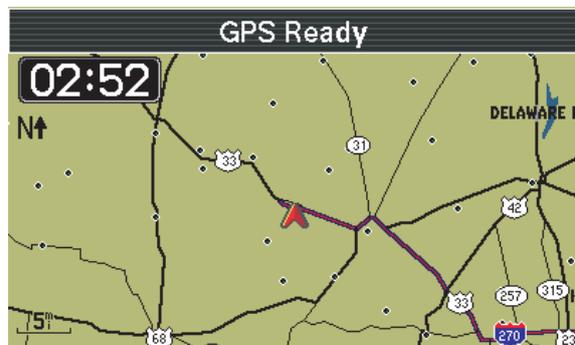**Updating your Software**. To update your system, you need a memory card holding the update software in a folder named 'Garmin'. Remove the current card, and then switch on the ignition to the 'ACC' position. When the screen invites you to press 'ENT' - DO NOT PRESS ENT. At this point, with the system running, insert your new card into the Sat Nav slot and wait. It often takes a while but be patient and do not switch off. Eventually, the system will read the software update and will indicate this with a progress box at the bottom of the screen. Once the update is complete the system will reboot automatically and restart. Press 'ENT' to continue.

Map Updates. For US bikes, map updates were available from the Garmin website. By registering your device ID on the website, you can then purchase new maps and download them to memory card. Unfortunately, this system only provides maps for USA and Canada and the latest available map update was 2015 (when I last checked). For European maps, HONDA provided their last Gen I update around 2011. However, as long as you have the latest software version installed, you can upload new maps either from free mapping sources on the internet or from a specialist. Unfortunately, as each year goes by, the maps grow in size. Back in 2008 the European map was just only 1GB so it fitted neatly on a 2GB CF card. Today the 2021 European map takes a whopping 4.2GB. This is due primarily to the expansion of the European borders which now include the Eastern European states, but also due to the massive increase in detail contained in the new maps. As a result, the Gen I Navi, with its small (2GB) internal memory, has been left behind. However, there is no need to despair. The current maps can be split between 3 or more CF cards and so touring around Europe can be done simply by changing cards as you pass between mapping regions. Each time you exchange the map card, the new map is automatically read in. This also holds true for the US and Canada maps which need 2.9 GB for full coverage.
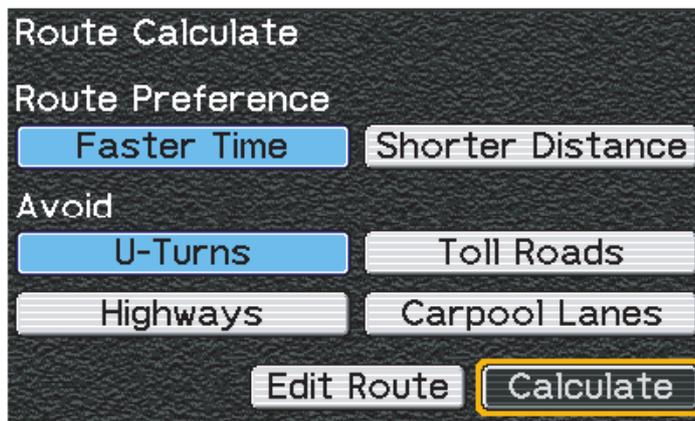
Operating your Gen I Sat Nav. The HONDA Sat Nav supplement that comes with your bike provides a detailed description of the functions and settings for your Sat Nav and it is useful to sit down with a beer for a few hours and study exactly what your system can do.   However, the software updates and the increased map sizes have introduced a few foibles into the system for which we need to use a few work-arounds.

1. **Find by POI**. After the update and the use of new maps, the '**Find by POI**' function will not work if you try to select '**Find by Name**' in any category; you will just get a frozen alphanumeric keyboard that will not accept data entries. If you get there, just press the '**BACK'** button to go back to the menu selection. However, you can still use the POI function by selecting the '**Nearest**' function. This will provide a list of the nearest POIs according to the categories filter that you selected earlier. Now let's say you want to route to somewhere like Manchester Airport but you don't know where it is exactly. Press the '**MAP**' button to view the map. Now zoom out using the zoom button either at the right-hand knee panel or using the zoom button on the left handlebar controller. Zoom out until you can see Manchester then use the navigation buttons (UP, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT) to move the cursor into the Manchester area. Now go to '**MENU**'/**FIND/By Point of Interest**' and select the Category for '**Transportation/Air Transportation**' and press '**ENT**'. Now select '**Nearest**' and a list of POIs in the Manchester area (ie around the cursor position) will be shown and you can scroll down to select the airport you want.

2. **Find by Exit**. The technique of moving the cursor to the general area you want to look in is very useful in most of the 'FIND' functions. Let's say you are heading for Weston-Super-Mare, so you might aim for the M5 exit on the A370 into Weston. Just move the cursor to the general area of the motorway at WSM then select '**Find/by Exit/Nearest Exits**' and the display will show a list of the exits in that area. Just pick the one you want and then route to it.

3. **Find by Cursor.** You can also find a destination simply by moving the cursor on the map to the required point, zoom in until you see the place or junction you want and press '**ENT**' and the screen will go straight to the screen allowing you to route to it or save as a favourite.

4. **Find by Postcode.**   Many are not aware that the Gen I system will accept a postcode in place of a 'City'.   When you select '**Find/ by Address**' you can type in a street name and the system will search the country for streets of that name. However, if you select the 'City' input and type either the City name or the first few characters of the Postcode (e.g. LN4) then a list will appear for the next number in the postcode (e.g. 1,2,3,4 etc). Select the appropriate number and then type in the Street name.   The postcode

information reduces the search to one postal code area and makes finding your street that much quicker and easier.

Limitations of the Gen I Sat Nav.

1. **Route Planning**. The increase in map detail means that the Gen I system can quickly become overloaded with data when trying to find a route, especially if your route will include a water crossing (e.g. across the channel). Let's say you have a new map covering UK down to Spain and Portugal and you want to attend the Portugal Treffen. If you find the location in Portugal and then try to '**Route to it'** the system will try to find a route and then give you a warning to saying '**not enough memory**'. To overcome this problem, you need to split your route into smaller legs (e.g. less than 1000 miles each), and add way points to reduce the number of routing possibilities. So for your trip to Portugal, you need to divide the trip say by your overnight stops and add in your ferry terminal as a way point. To do this find your destination for this leg, then when you get to the '**Route Calculate'** screen, select '**Edit Route**' then '**Add**' allows you to add a way point (e.g. your ferry port). If you still run out of memory then pick a closer destination and try again.

2. **Map Cards**. CF cards are nominally 2GB in size, however, they physically hold less than 2GB and it is not possible to use bigger capacity cards as the system cannot handle any larger files. So, if you are creating maps using Garmin Mapsource or Basecamp, you need to select a map no larger than about 1.8Gb; hence the European map has to be divided into at least 3 cards. For touring in Europe, you need to change cards when you get to the edge of each map coverage area. If you continue beyond the detailed map, you will only be able to see the major routes and cities. Map cards can be changed simply by replacing the current map card with a new one. After you switch on and Press '**ENT**' the new map will be read into memory and then the system will reboot allowing you to navigate and plan routes in the new map area.

Basemap Limitations of US import Bikes. If you ride a Gen I bike (2006 – 2009) imported from the US, no doubt you have found that the map detail at scales of greater than 2 miles per inch is very poor. The Gen I Sat Nav have an in-built Basemap which is burned into the system during manufacture. However, limitations on size meant that US bikes only have a detailed routable map for North America with only a minimum outline coverage for Europe. Likewise, European bikes have a detailed European Basemap but only minimal outline detail for North America. The Basemap is the first level used to calculate routes across country with the current installed map providing the finer details for the route. If you have an imported US Gen I Sat Nav in Europe, the map display will fail to provide details at scales at greater than 2 miles/inch even with a current European map card installed. This shortfall can be overcome by adding a European Basemap component to the current map image. So, when it comes to updating a US Gen I Sat Nav it is important tell your Sat Nav Specialist what you have and what you need.

Next Generation (Gen I.5)

The next generation (Gen I.5) of the GL1800 Sat Nav was introduced around 2010 but only on US bikes. The Gen I.5 Sat Nav is easily identified as it replaces the CF Map Card with a single SD Card. The SD Card provided a big advantage as it was more easily removed and replaced in its socket than the CF Card (which had 50 tiny pins in its connector). The Gen I.5 system ran on Software Version 2.2. This version was certainly better than the original Gen I software and it provided added features such as full Post code searches and it can read up to 4GB maps. The move to Gen I.5 changed the way that the Sat Nav operated at a system level and it became more like the Sat Nav unit you would have on your car dashboard. This meant that the SD Card now carried a part of the operating system as well as the map file. If you plug the SD card into your computer you will see a complex file system in the Garmin folder. Changing files on the card makes it possible to update voices, background maps and of course the system software (sys.bin). The Gen I.5 was a significant step forward from Gen I and it acted as a stepping stone to it's replacement when the remodelled 2012 GL1800 model came to the market.

Second Generation (Gen II)

The 2012 GL1800 came fitted with the second generation (Gen II) Sat Nav. This unit is identified by the fact that it has 2 SD cards. One SD Card is easily visible in the Sat Nav processor and is used for storing mp3 music and for uploading custom routes. Custom or Garmin Routes is a system for planning your route on a computer and then transferring the route to your Sat Nav and sharing it with others using a memory card. The second SD card is located below the first card and is protected by a rubber boot. It holds the Sat Nav system software together with the installed map files. The introduction of the Gen II created a few teething problems that took a while to resolve resulting in a HONDA recall program to update the firmware bringing the system up to Software Version 2.5. Unfortunately, this version continued to have a problem with Custom Routes, which was finally solved at Software Version 2.8. There has since been a further update to version 2.9 but further difficulties have been reported with it that has encouraged riders to stick with version 2.8. Software updates are available from your HONDA dealer or just speak to a GL1800 Sat Nav specialist.

2018 GL1800

The new 2018 GL1800 comes with a highly sophisticated Sat Nav that incorporates all of the features we have been hoping for. It also comes with 10 years of map updates from HERE (An internet based mapping company). Sat Nav updates need to be downloaded from the HONDA UK site and must be placed onto a USB drive. The European update is currently around 11GB in size and the process takes quite some time both to download to your USB and then to upload to the bike.

Summary. In my view, the GL1800 integrated Sat Nav is a little gem and with just a little extra care and attention you can make it a very useful navigation tool to support your touring no matter which generation of the system you have. The manufacturer's support for this system has been spotty to say the least but you can learn for yourself or speak to specialists who can help you update your system and get the best out of it. So don't be afraid to seek out support and you can soon be riding around with current maps running on a great little system. If you need support in updating your system or advice on how to use it, you can contact me or any other specialist through the GWOC members Facebook page.

Stephen Taylor