



STEP TO THE EDGE

STORY BY **JOSH TACK**

→ GARMIN PRODUCES some of the best navigational devices for aviation, marine, automotive, outdoor, and sporting use. Despite their massive reach in various markets, they have given an impressive amount of attention to bicycling over the years. They have been a title sponsor at the highest level of competitive bicycle racing since 2008, and have been steadily growing their Edge series of cycling-specific GPS units. Last fall they introduced two new Edge devices, the Touring and Touring Plus.

If you're already familiar with Garmin's touch screen Edge units, such as the 810 or 510, consider this a departure from what you're used to. The name leaves no room for interpretation. The Edge Touring is simply for

bicycle touring. You won't find a lot of performance features here, as the unit lacks the ability to read power meters, cadence, and it won't produce ghost riders to compete against. The key areas of focus are route creation, points of interest, and Garmin's move to OpenStreetMap. Battery life has also been extended, giving you up to 17 hours of runtime on a single charge.

Before we jump too far into the details, the product tested for this piece is the Edge Touring Plus model. This takes all the features you'll find in the basic Edge Touring unit, and adds a temperature sensor, support for ANT+ eBikes and heart rate, and has a more accurate barometric altimeter sensor. Out of the box, you get the Touring Plus unit, handlebar/stem mounting hardware, and USB cable for charging and transferring data in addition to a preloaded microSD card with Garmin maps to get you started.

The interface is very intuitive, taking almost no time to get comfortable with. The touch screen display



is pressure sensitive,

meaning you can use it just fine with or without gloves.

There are also three buttons, one for power, one for starting and stopping a recording, and another for marking laps. When you fire up the GPS, you're given two choices: "view map" or "where to?". For first-time use, I suggest you simply start moving. The unit will automatically detect motion and ask if you want to start recording a trip. Hit the start/stop button and you're on your way to recording your first ride. It's that easy.

Once you begin recording a ride, the screen pulls up a map and displays your current location, speed, and heading. Swiping to the left or right on the screen allows you to bring up one of four displays: a digital compass; metrics display with speed, time and distance; an elevation profile; and then back to your map page. All of these pages are customizable in the system settings, allowing you to add, remove, and reorganize the information displayed. Garmin has done an excellent job making sure the screen is easy to read while on the bike. It also detects darker hours by time of day, and adjusts the colors of the maps to make them easier to read in low-light conditions. Just make sure you don't get too sucked into the data and keep a sharp eye on the road. When you've wrapped up your ride, hit the start/stop button again and you're able to save your ride.

As you start saving rides, they are stored on your Garmin device. At any time, you can pull up a ride you've done in the past and check out a quick summary of your stats. You can view the route's map, elevation profile, distance, your elapsed time, average and maximum speeds, altitude gain, and an estimation of your calories burned. If you want to redo this ride, you need to save it out as a course. If you're wondering what the difference is between a ride and course, a ride is a route you've done and can view statistics for. A course is a ride you've saved or loaded to the device that can be navigated again.

While you can view a lot of your data straight off the Edge Touring unit itself, it can be a lot easier to keep it organized online through Garmin Connect (connect.garmin.com). This is a free online community where you can upload, analyze, share your rides, and even create courses to upload back to your Garmin device.

You will need to create a user account on Garmin Connect, but once you've done that loading your rides to the website is a cinch. I keep the Garmin USB cable plugged into my computer at all times, and simply plug in my Garmin unit after each ride. The

website recognizes my device, and asks if I want to upload any new activities. As a bonus, the Garmin begins recharging while you're uploading ride data.

While you're on Garmin Connect, it's a good idea to poke around and familiarize yourself with some of the options. There are some generic training plans if you want to build up for an upcoming century ride, and it's fun to start following some of your riding buddies who are also on the Garmin community to share progress with each other. One key feature is the OpenStreetMap, an open-source, user-generated mapping platform. With this, you can create courses for anywhere in the world and load them up to your Garmin. Dare to dream when you're creating a course. You can route yourself around the block, or from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine.

Suppose you're on vacation, or on a tour where you don't have the ability to go to a computer and preemptively load routes. This is where we dive into one of the Garmin's key features. You can go ahead and consider the Edge Touring your personal travel planner. You can discover routes a couple different ways. The first is through the "Round-Trip Routing" feature. Through this menu option, you type in the distance you want to ride and pick a starting location that is either manually selected on a map, or chosen based on your current location. After a minute or two of searching, you will be given three route options which you can pull up and view on a map. Select one of the routes, and you will be given turn-by-turn directions that will take you out, and bring you back to where you started. In the settings, you can fine tune the styles of routes queried. Some options include avoiding unpaved roads, minimizing climbing, and choosing between general cycling routes and mountain biking. While this might not be a feature you use often for local rides, it's perfect for base camp-style bike vacations, or anytime you're out of town with a bike.

Another on-the-fly routing option is the "Route Planner" feature. Through this menu, you choose a starting point

and a finishing destination, as well as any points in between for mid-ride breaks. To choose these, you can manually select them off the map, but you can also take advantage of the Point of Interest (POI) capabilities of the Edge Touring units. Some relevant POIs available include restaurants, convenience stores, hotels, campgrounds, libraries, and movie theaters. This is not only a good touring feature, but also a great asset have if you're simply trying to route out some errands in unfamiliar territory. For instance, it makes for an easy way to plot out an efficient route to hit a laundromat, pick up some groceries, grab a beer at a bar, go back to pick up your laundry, and return to where you started.

If you have GPX files you want to load on this unit, there are no issues there. I loaded up some of Adventure Cycling's GPX files for a few routes through the Missoula area with no problem. Depending on how many waypoints are included in your file, you might need to use multiple microSD cards.

The ANT+ capabilities found on the Edge Touring Plus aren't going to be used by everybody, but they are nice to have if you're interested in heart rate, however, you will need to purchase a heart rate strap separately. If you're among the growing population of eBike users, this has the ability to sync to ANT+ enabled eBikes to provide you with an estimated range of distance remaining on your battery charge.

The Edge Touring Plus retails for \$299, making it a great value for a GPS-enabled cyclocomputer. If you're interested in some add-ons for the Edge Touring units, I would steer you towards Garmin's external battery pack, which retails for \$90. This can double your battery life, and includes a solar panel, USB cable, and international outlet charger to ensure your power is topped off anywhere in the world. 

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