



# RIDDEN TO DISTRACTION

STORY BY **JOSH TACK**

→ NOT TOO LONG AGO my mother suggested I get a book called *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder* by Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey. It was a well-intentioned suggestion, and I did purchase the book, but who in their right mind can expect someone with attention deficit disorder to plow through a 400-page book written by medical professionals? I can barely re-read my own articles (huge thanks to all who edit them), although it did get me thinking about the distractions faced while cycling.

No matter where you're riding, there's never a shortage of distractions. If you're hitting the mountain bike trails, you have wildlife, obstacles, and, hopefully, some great views to keep your mind busy. In the city, there's traffic, random objects strewn about, and numerous turns to be taken. For longer rides on highways and backroads, you have faster-moving traffic to contend with and you can be more exposed to the elements such as wind and the blazing hot sun. If that's not enough to take your mind off the

road or trail, consider all the gadgets we affix to our handlebars. With lights, bells, cyclocomputers, GPS, and cameras, there are plenty of buttons to poke at and information to get lost in.

To help declutter your handlebars, here are a couple of products I've recently checked out that can help you maintain your focus on the path ahead while giving you the information you want. We'll kick it off with navigation.

With paper maps, bicycle-specific GPS units, and smartphones, there are a lot of options available for navigating from one point to another on a bike. Visual map navigation is fine, but it's probably best suited for when you're stopped. For navigating on the fly, it's often not a problem to glance at a map for a quick point of reference, but depending on how busy the map is, there might be a lot to take in, which takes your eyes off the road.

Enter the CycleNav from Schwinn. Yup, you read that right, Schwinn. It's been a while since I've tried anything from them that wasn't steel and from the 1980s, so I had to do a doubletake when I saw a navigation device that hooks into their own smartphone app. Hey, in a year in which we see Diamondback supplying a pro cycling team with high-end road bikes, why not?

To use the CycleNav you will first need to pair it to your smartphone through a Bluetooth connection, then download Schwinn's free app, which is available for iOS and Android smartphones. Once you've downloaded the app, you're walked through some basic settings and a quick tutorial. Within the app, you're able to choose a starting and ending address, in addition to waypoints along the way such as a coffee stop. Then you're supplied with a route to follow. With your route plotted and the CycleNav mounted to your handlebars, you can safely stow your phone in a pocket or bag and begin riding.

To help you navigate, the CycleNav has three lights pointing left, right, and forward in addition to a speaker that produces voice commands. The visual and voice cues provide two ways to quickly take in approaching turns while keeping your focus on the road. If you're unsure about the cue you just heard, there's a silver button you can press that will repeat the command. When your ride is complete, the app saves your ride stats, such as distance and time, for later viewing and sharing online.

This device is probably best suited for city riding, which has a lot of turning cues to hit. That said, I can also see it being handy for longer rides in unfamiliar territory, especially with its 10-hour battery life. It charges using a USB cable, which is included in the package.

The overall construction does feel a little on the



fragile side so I would recommend it for road use only. It will stand up to light rain, but it's not rainproof, so cover it up with a plastic bag in downpours. Mounting the unit to your bars is a tool-free operation, and it accommodates bars with diameters up to 31.8 mm. As an added bonus, it has a built-in headlight in case you unexpectedly get caught out in the dark. All in all this is a very cool product from Schwinn that retails for \$60 ([schwinnbikes.com/usa/cyclenav](http://schwinnbikes.com/usa/cyclenav)).

Another aspect of cycling that can distract your attention is something as simple as conversation. Cycling with a companion is a great way to make the miles tick by more quickly. However, wind and traffic noise can make it difficult to hear each other unless you are riding side by side. On roads with narrow shoulders, the last thing you need is to forget your position in the road while getting lost in a string of conversation.

Helmet-mounted communication devices are a great way to maintain clear back-and-forth banter while keeping a safe position and focus on the road. They are a popular product

among motorsports enthusiasts, such as motorcyclists and snowmobilers, so it's no surprise that the HBC100 Plus Bluetooth helmet communicator by UCLEAR ([uclear-digital.com](http://uclear-digital.com)) is a product from the motorsports sector attempting to gain some favor among the pedal-powered community.

The test product I had on hand was the HBC100 Plus Dual Pack, which contained a pair of units for two riders. Out of the box, I had two sets of receivers, microphone/speaker pieces, some adhesive Velcro patches to affix everything to my helmet, and a couple of USB cables that are used to charge the system.

What sets the HBC100 Plus apart from other helmet-mounted communication systems is that there is no boom-style microphone for speaking. The microphone is instead embedded into the speaker earpiece for a sleek and unobtrusive appearance.

The full system will attach to both vented and non-vented helmets. Because it was initially designed for full-face motorsports helmets, I did have some trouble getting it mounted

properly to a helmet that only has half-face coverage. After some trial and error, I found some flat surfaces on my heavily vented

Rudy Project Sterling helmet that worked.

The system is Bluetooth enabled, so you will need to pair all units in use together.

This isn't the most intuitive process, and I highly recommend hanging onto

the directions in case you find yourself needing to pair it to another HBC100 Plus unit. The current firmware for these devices allows for the pairing of up to four cyclists. You can also pair this to a Bluetooth-enabled music player, phone, or GPS device for turn-by-turn directions.

Looking at the controls, there are only three buttons to deal with. They are large enough to be found easily by feel, which is good considering you can't see them when they are on your head. Regardless, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the controls before heading out on a ride.

On the road, the units have an impressive connection range of 500 meters. If you're farther away from your riding partner than that, there's a chance the two of you aren't interested in talking to each other anyway. When you are on speaking terms, conversation is voice activated and picks up immediately. There are no cues or buttons to press to begin audio pickup. In my experience, the wind did not cause a great deal of interference in sound quality.

The HBC100 Plus Dual Pack retails for \$370, whereas a single unit will run you \$200. This is right in line with the cost of comparable devices. If most of your rides take place in areas of higher traffic concentration, this is definitely something to consider.

Whether these products are for you or not, the point is that you should make every effort possible to maintain your focus on the road. If you need to double-check your location on a map or talk to your riding partner on a busy road, never underestimate the power and wisdom of pulling off the road to a safe place before hashing it all out. **AC**

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