



Distance measuring devices have become an integral part of the game today. Club golfers used to rely on 150 yard markers and yardage books to get distances, but GPS and rangefinders are well on their way to knocking traditional ways of accessing yardages on the head forever.

While most lasers haven't changed much over the years, GPS technology is

evolving to create some seriously powerful multi-functional devices.

So with SkyCaddie claiming their new SX500 GPS handheld is replacing lasers and yardage books in our pro bags, and Garmin having equipped the new Approach G80 with a radar launch monitor, now seemed like the perfect time to see if either are worth spending your hard earned cash on this year.

THE DETAILS

► Price: £449.99
www.garmin.com



GARMIN APPROACH G80

www.garmin.com

YOU NEED TO KNOW

The G80 combines Garmin's extensive GPS know-how with radar technology to create a GPS launch monitor. The 3.5in colour touch-screen can be read in direct sunlight. And the launch monitor function tracks club speed, ball speed, smash factor, swing tempo, and gives an estimated carry distance. Practice modes allow you to work on swing tempo or improve shot consistency/accuracy. Garmin say the launch monitor is accurate to +/- 5mph for club speed, +/- 2mph for ball speed and within five yards of carry distance.

DISPLAY: 7/10

If two friends rocked up on the first tee on a Saturday morning both bearing new GPS units, but one had purchased the SkyCaddie while the other shelled out for the Garmin, the owner of the Garmin would feel short-changed as soon as the pair put the devices side-by-side. The screen is a bit darker and duller, and the quality of the graphics is nowhere near as detailed or clear as the former.

YARDAGES: 8/10

Garmin are to GPS what Dominos are to pizza – they've built a massive business out of distances and navigation so we have no doubt the yardage info offered by the G80 is accurate. If, though, mental arithmetic isn't your strength, working out what a lay-up on a par 5 leaves into the green might leave you feeling you need the brain power of Einstein, whereas the SkyCaddie automatically calculates everything for you in an instant.

TECH: 10/10

As a standalone GPS the G80 is absolutely fine, but probably not too much different to what you've seen before. It certainly won't convince pros to drop their laser or yardage book any time soon. But thanks to the built-in radar launch monitor (it just needs supporting on a golf ball), it comes into its own, offering something unavailable anywhere else in the GPS market. And we reckon that brings a completely new dimension



to GPS units. Granted, the launch monitor data it generates is limited, but as a practice tool, or working on gapping and distances, and for a few friendly challenges at the range, it's a useful tool for not that much more cash than a decent laser. An interesting and useful addition for reasonable club golfers.

DESIRABILITY: 8/10

GPS units are evolving quickly into multi-functional devices and the G80 is right at the cutting edge of that evolution. Combining a GPS with radar launch is genius thinking, but who will get the most out of it? We reckon first off the target market has to be golfers who love a gadget. But it's also likely to find a place among enthusiastic players who'll put in the time on the range to gap their bag properly while learning a bit extra about their game through the launch monitor and tempo training functions.

VERDICT: 33/40

Some will say this test compares apples to pears, as only one device offers launch monitor capabilities, but the G80 and SX500 are top-of-the-range units. At the end of the day the Garmin is a lot of dosh, but it offers everything you'd expect of a good GPS with the extra benefit of a launch monitor, which to some will make it worthwhile. For us, like most serious golfers who put a premium on accurate yardages, if we had to choose between them, as fun as the G80 could be, we'd sacrifice launch data for the SkyCaddie's brilliant GPS functionality.