

SkyCaddie SX500 vs Garmin Approach G80

How two of the most high-tech GPS handhelds compare back-to-back

THE DETAILS

► Price: £379.95

www.skycaddie.co.uk



SKYCADDIE SX500

www.skycaddie.co.uk

YOU NEED TO KNOW

The SX500 has a 5in full colour touch-screen, which SkyCaddie say makes the unit golf's biggest GPS display. Some 20 players on the Staysure Tour (formerly the European Seniors) have put an SX500 in their bags, instead of a laser or yardage book. Every course on the SkyCaddie database is mapped on foot, whereas competitors use aerial photography to calculate yardages. The SX500 comes with a year's membership; after this you'll need an annual subscription, which starts from £29.95 (nationwide courses) and rises to £44.95 (worldwide courses).

DISPLAY: 10/10

The SkyCaddie has the biggest HD screen of any GPS system we've ever used, just 0.5in shy of an iPhone 8 Plus, so there's plenty of space to see hole layouts, but some might think it's a little too big to slip discreetly into a trouser pocket. The screen is every bit as responsive as a smartphone, too; it's bright with clear graphics and thanks to the extra size we had no difficulty clicking on icons or buttons, which can get really annoying on smaller devices, even wearing a golf glove.

YARDAGES: 10/10

Yes, other GPS systems offer the ability to position the flag on the green (the Garmin does) and see run-outs to hazards, but it's how the SX500 automatically works out not only how far your perfect lay-up is away, but also the distance it leaves into the pin too (and front and back edge of the greens), that puts it on a different level. It also shows how much space is in front and behind the flag and to both sides of the green – it's like having a professional caddie in your pocket, calling out distances! All without the hassle of trying to lock onto a target while using a laser or work out any calculations in your head. We can see why pros feel there are benefits over a laser; right now you won't find more in-depth yardage info anywhere.

TECH: 10/10

We admire SkyCaddie for getting out and mapping every course on their database, and the extra knowledge comes through in improved shapes of greens and hazards when compared side by side with the Garmin. The SX500 has a built-in 13MP



camera so you can snap and share pictures from your round, and the list of features is endless. We like how IntelliGreen Pro shows major green tiers and contours, just like a Tour pro's yardage book. It means golfers can make an informed decision before hitting a shot. And the Dynamic Rangeview (with club ranges) shows multiple yardage arcs across a hole, along with which clubs you hit to each distance, which makes for some simple and accurate club selection.

DESIRABILITY: 7/10

What do we mean by desirability? Well, who needs one? And who really should be using one? SkyCaddie would argue everybody should have one, of course, but we reckon some golfers would be bamboozled by the amount of info the SX500 has to offer. Serious golfers are the target market and they'll appreciate everything the SX500 has to offer. That might be golfers currently using a laser, or golfers who've tried GPS before, but felt it wasn't quite as useful or as accurate as a laser for scoring. Just remember, though, that after the first year you'll need to pay a subscription to get this level of course detail.

VERDICT: 37/40

This is hands-down the best GPS we've ever used. The SX500 can do things a laser never will, and for us that makes it a brilliant piece of kit. It's pricey, but it's so clever and we can see why, for the first time, pros are seriously looking at GPS as a way to replace their trusted lasers. Thanks to its size, the SX500 will probably be better attached to a trolley or kept in a bag pocket, like a laser. But if you put a premium on knowing the exact distance to the flag, or anything else on the golf course for that matter, we don't think you'll find a better device for doing it in 2019.



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.