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KVH TracVision A7 In-Car DirecTV and Web Access

REVIEW DATE: 22-SEP-2006

By [Bill Howard](#)



Some kids define "good parents" as those who plunk down \$1,000 for the rear-seat entertainment package. If that's the case, truly great parents will be the ones who come up with \$3,000 for DirecTV access to the car, and another \$70 a month for mobile broadband.

Market leader KVH recently shipped its much-improved, second-generation TracVision A7, a satellite TV package along with a companion MSN TV mobile broadband service that can support up to five users in one car. The two can be used independently and even simultaneously, if the vehicle has multiple screens.

KVH sees two markets: families traveling long distances in vans and SUVs, and business users. By 2011, 20 million vehicles will have in-vehicle passenger video systems, according to analyst firm Frost & Sullivan. Similarly, a 2005 J.D. Power & Associates survey found 60 percent of SUV owners wanted video-based entertainment systems in their next SUVs, as did 50 percent of minivan owners.

The TracVision A7, which just became available, integrates a GPS module that helps orient the antenna more quickly as the car turns, to avoid signal loss. It comprises a circular phased-array antenna bubble measuring 5 x 31 x 32 inches (HWD) that mounts on the roof (or rear deck), a DirecTV receiver created by KVH and DirecTV for 12-volt environments, and a remote control. Users will have to provide their own displays – probably using the back seat entertainment system that's already installed.

More Reliable Signal

In a test drive in Manhattan, improvements over the TracVision A5 (still on the market) were immediately noticeable: The A7 stays tuned to satellite signals more reliably, with fewer disrupted pictures (as you'd suffer on a home unit in heavy rainfall) or signal loss, and appears better able to deal with roadside trees and other small obstructions, although office canyons remain problematic. When the signal is lost, it comes back more quickly. Though our experience was brief, reception quality seemed better.

Also, the A7 now receives local TV stations as satellite broadcasts, in your home area only, along with XM Satellite Radio. That is, if you live in Miami, you can pull in Miami TV stations while traveling in the greater Miami area. But what if you want to watch your hometown Miami news when you're in the Atlanta or New Orleans designated market area (DMA)? Tough: Once the GPS senses you've left the region, local TV is disabled. What customers might want doesn't matter as much as what DirecTV's providers want you to have. Eventually when local market agreements are in place, says KVH, you might be able to watch other local stations when you're traveling out of town: New Orleans stations when you're visiting New Orleans, for example.

One gotcha that remains from the A5: Professional sports events, which have regional blackouts, may not be available anywhere. Eventually, KVH hopes to show that its GPS-integrated module can enforce geographic restrictions, allowing you to see the sports you'd see with a traditional DirecTV setup at your home location.

If you already have DirecTV, the monthly fee is the same as for adding another receiver in the home: \$5 a month. Otherwise, it's \$45 a month for a Total Choice Mobile package, including local channels in most of the 142 markets with local channel availability.

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