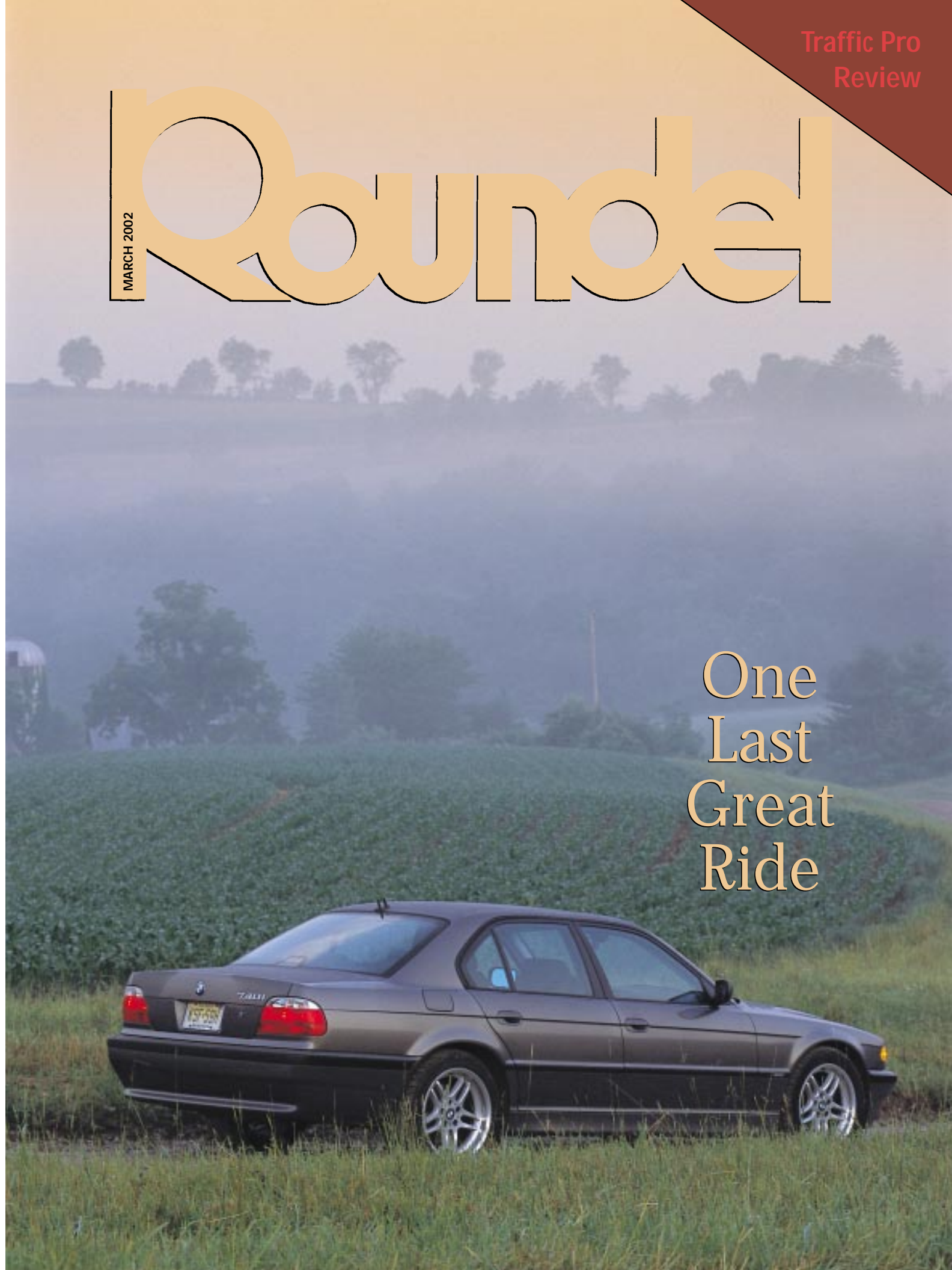


Traffic Pro  
Review

# Roundel

MARCH 2002

One  
Last  
Great  
Ride



Becker's Traffic Pro can ease the tensions of the I-don't-need-no-map syndrome.

# Topping the Y Chromosome

Story and photographs by RACHEL COREY

"Anyone who is too stupid to use a map shouldn't be driving," said the Y Chromosome. Usually I would have agreed with him, but this time I was about to drive through the wilds of West Virginia and Kentucky by myself in a ragtop. Talk to me about the superiority of maps when it's dark, it's late, and you have only a bunch of trees and a cow for landmarks: I recognize that barn, and those

chickens. We passed them an hour ago. Is that the same chicken? The fun quotient disappears when there is no gas station, and the dropped top of my convertible suggests I should study the stars to find my location.

Maybe what pushed me over the edge to get a GPS unit was that surly woman from Holiday Inn. If you have cell-phone service and you're driving the Interstates

toward major cities, a call to Holiday Inn's 800 number can find you a room for the night. But when I asked them to find me a hotel near where I was headed and gave them the Interstate exit location, the answer was, "If you don't know which hotel you want, you're wasting my time!" CLICK!

At least with GPS I'd know where I was, and I knew that Becker had a GPS unit

designed for my car: I had seen it demonstrated at the BMW's Spartanburg Z3 Homecoming in 2000. A friend in England had a version of the Becker Traffic Pro unit in his Mercedes, and he told me the unit was going to be available in Europe for BMW.

So where's mine? Not available in the U.S. Okay, fine; I shopped around for other units. BMW makes a GPS unit available for its other models, but it won't fit in my little Z3 console. I don't want a unit that sits on the dash, obscuring some of my precious view of the road and possibly interfering with deployment of the airbags. Besides, I don't need to see the GPS... if it talks to me. And there are other considerations involved with your choice of GPS units—like the time midnight found us pulled off the road in dark black nowhere half an hour into Kentucky's Mountain Parkway. I bet it's gorgeous by day. At night it is the stuff of which cartoons are made: pitch-black night, surrounded by those big white eyes. Thick country darkness, lit only by the two bright yellow painted lines on the road reflecting our headlights.

I had a stack of maps and hotel catalogs, a computer and a cell phone, and I still had no idea where we were. I asked the Y Chromosome to check his GPS—which prompted five words I will always remember: *I haven't got Kentucky loaded.*

Global Positioning Satellites tell the unit where you are on the globe; the local-area data you've loaded translates longitude and latitude into useful information. A GPS unit, therefore, is like a gun or a Pez dispenser: absolutely useless unless it is loaded.

What I want from GPS is not much: Just tell me where I am. And tell me out loud, please: I don't have time to stop and read. Happily, the Traffic Pro does more than that.

It will tell you where you are, where you are going, when you'll arrive, where the hotels and restaurants are—and shopping malls and car dealerships and hospitals and parks and all sorts of other "points of interest"—but only when you want it to. Traffic Pro will even turn down the volume on the music. It does all this mercifully with two buttons. Two buttons makes things simple. If it isn't this button, it's the other button. How's that for a manual?

Available? Well, I was just lucky. I pestered the folks at Becker, pleaded a bit, and sang them the sad story of Mountain Parkway. I told them of my plans to return to South Carolina—from New York City—via Kentucky. I offered to beta-test their unit and mapping software in the U.S. I promised to take it onto the back roads of half the country and put it through its paces. They bit.



Need gas? A good GPS system tells you more than a map will.

Better yet, it never complains about your driving.

Traffic Pro takes up zero space, replacing the in-dash radio head unit—and it sounds better than the stock radio. Its CD player also sounds better than my after-market head unit. A GPS made by another manufacturer does much of what Traffic Pro does, but it's ugly—and it takes twelve CDs to cover the United States. Traffic Pro fits the BMW decor, looks better than the stock unit, and uses two CDs for the entire United States.

Two CDs. I never have to hear *I don't have Kentucky loaded* again.

The installation of Traffic Pro in a BMW Z3 is blonde-proof. You could maybe chip a nail, but if you can fish a wire, you can install Traffic Pro. Remove your head unit, clip the big plastic plug from the back of your old unit onto the Traffic Pro, and connect a wire to a plug down by the gearshift. That's it. Then install the antenna: Pull off the passenger-side A-pillar cover, and pull out your passenger side and center vents. Run the antenna wire from the dash down to the vents and plug it in the back of the Traffic Pro. Ta-da!

Hooked into BMW's Speed Sensitive Volume, Traffic Pro will lower the music to talk



Running low on cash? Where's the nearest ATM, Bernie?

GPS can help you avoid road obstacles and traffic jams.



to you and increase its volume when you speed up. It checks how far you travel by pulses sent to your wheels, so even when you go through a tunnel and the satellites lose touch, Traffic Pro knows where you are. Traffic Pro also monitors your reverse lights, so it knows if you are going backwards or forwards, orienting you to your line of travel.

Pick a voice, male or female. I picked male and named him Bernie. I fell in love with Bernie when he helped me home from Becker headquarters in New Jersey. On my way there, I had missed the turn for Becker and had to drive to the next city to get back. Never again! Bernie warns me in plenty of time to get into the right or left lane to take an exit or make a turn, and tells me how far around the circle I have to travel.

Once I had fallen in with Bernie, I found more uses for him than just guiding me to South Carolina. When my mother went in for surgery, I was understandably fraught, and I had a hard time concentrating driving to and from the hospital. Bernie was a huge help, like having a friend along who knows the way. Once I was low on gas outside the Lincoln Tunnel—twenty minutes running on empty in heavy traffic. Bernie found me a gas station 500 yards away outside the tunnel.

And unlike most men, Bernie never forgets: I visit your house once, I never have to ask directions again. Or if I wake up somewhere unfamiliar, I can get home. Traffic Pro will find a route around obstacles; I even pushed the intercept button when I saw a puddle too large to drive through safely, and Bernie routed me safely around the block. I avoid traffic jams by restricting the route to cut out highways or toll roads. In New York City after September 11, there were lots of surprise roadblocks in the city; Traffic Pro helped me find my way through a war zone.

Which brings us back to the Y Chromosome in New York City. I was driving, because he didn't want to drive my car in

heavy traffic—but this didn't stop him from kibitzing and meddling and fiddling with everything in the car. Finally I tossed him the keys and said I was done; he could drive the rest of the way to his house in Penn-

sylvania. "Great," he said. "But would you please turn Bernie back on? I know the way, of course, but..."

Traffic Pro: saving men from asking directions all over the world. ♦



Not only do you know which road to take, you know the roads to avoid.



The Traffic Pro's amber illumination is a close match for BMW's interior lighting.