

Bendix King Av8or

After test flying the new Bendix King AV8OR touch screen hand-held portable gps for over 12 months now, and I like its recipe of giving high-end functions at a lower cost. So I was predictably intrigued when the company announced earlier this year that it was introducing what is essentially a scaled-up version of the Bendix King Av8or, called the Bendix King Av8or Ace. Like the original, the Ace is a touch-screen, portable, multifunction moving-map navigator with all the features of the original and then some.

The big difference between the two is clear for all to see the display. The Ace's bright, colorful 7-inch diagonal display (compared with 4.3 inches diagonally for the original Bendix King Av8or) makes all the difference, giving the Bendix King Av8or ACE a big advantage over its smaller sibling, not just in real estate but in utility.

I raved about the touch screen of the Bendix King Av8or in my review of it last year, and the technology of the Ace seems identical, and equally good. Like many touch-screen devices, the Ace has a virtual keypad for typing in the name of a fix or an address on the auto navigator. Even though the smallish size of the keys makes success at typing seem unlikely, I was amazed by the unit's ability to figure out what letter I was aiming at even when I was slightly off. And the level of touch required is just right.

In terms of features, the Bendix King Av8or Ace is packed, though some require that the user buy an additional third-party receiver, and most require service subscription.

In my book, the must-have add-on is XM satellite weather. For those pilots who don't have satellite weather in the panel, the Ace offers a way to get a good-size XM display at an attractive price. On one of my flights with the unit, I headed up to Denton, Texas, on just the kind of day when you need weather in the cockpit most. The ride was in and out of the clouds and it was bumpy, thanks to a nasty line of convective activity just to the west. With the unit connected to a WxWorx XM receiver using a Bluetooth connection, I used the Ace to check and recheck the weather to see what my best options were. The conditions were fast-changing, so it was great to have not only the Nexrad picture, but graphical and textual metars too. Using the touch screen, I simply "clicked" on the airport icon at Denton, requested more information and checked out the textual weather.

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Written by Mongoose Bikes

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One thing I don't like is that the Bendix King Av8or Ace doesn't overlay the weather onto the moving map screen, a feature we've all come to expect. Instead you have to access it through the "weather" page. That page does, however, show your flight-plan route, so it's easy to keep track of where the weather is in relation to your route of flight.

The other killer app for the Ace is charts, for which Bendix/King teamed with Seattle Avionics, a company that specializes in charting and flight-planning software. Chart subscriptions and downloads are purchased through an easy, automated, nearly seamless process.

On the Ace you get a variety of charts — IFR charts of every description, from approaches to STARS, and something I really like, scanned en route charts, both high and low level. There are no scanned VFR charts for the Bendix King Av8or Ace, an omission that some users will miss, though not me. The update rate on the Ace is good enough that when you pan ahead on the map, it takes just a couple of seconds for the unit to redraw the screen.

That day I wound up diverting back to Austin, and back, I simply clicked on the AUS icon on the map screen, requested "more info," loaded the chart and selected the one I knew I'd get, the ILS for Runway 17L. I followed my progress on the Ace as I flew the approach.

While the Ace boasts a good-size screen, IFR charts are not full size. At full-screen view, the text is too small to be easily readable. Of course, you can zoom and pan to see different chart details up close. For many pilots, this unit will serve as a backup, their "ace" in the hole, so to speak.

The Bendix King Av8or Ace, as you've no doubt figured out, is a competitor to the Garmin 696, and as such, it's been popular so far. With its almost identical display and similar feature set, the Ace is, at face value, a good alternative to the 696.

Two factors complicate the decision. First, at around \$2,000 with features that most buyers will pick (but before the XM receiver), the Ace costs a lot less, in fact about \$700 less, based on typical street prices, than a comparably equipped 696. But 696 prices have been dropping and will likely continue to do so.

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Also, the software on the Bendix King Av8or Ace isn't as sophisticated, easy to use or visually refined as Garmin's. Simple things like viewing an approach require a few extra button pushes that seem based on software requirements rather than the user's needs. And it can take a while to figure out how to do simple things, like switch from portrait to landscape view or go directly to a destination. And the Bluetooth setup for the XM weather receiver is surprisingly complicated. Like the 696, the Ace requires the use of external power for all but short flights.

After using the AV8OR for a couple of weeks now, I'm feeling at home with it. I love the display, the charts, the XM weather and the touch screen. I'm getting used to the software quirks, and I love the auto navigator and multimedia player.

The bottom line: Pilots who are thinking of getting a 696 but who are worried about the cost would be smart to look into the Bendix King Av8or Ace with its great display, excellent available charts, XM weather and available traffic (a utility that I did not test). Like its predecessor, the AV8OR Ace offers a lot of features on a great platform, and it does it for less.