

Sights & Sounds of Multimedia

George Harding,

Schwinn Tailwind bicycle

One of the best parts of the Consumer Electronics Show is an event for press called ShowStoppers. Here, some 50 companies present their wares to the press who attend CES.

One of the interesting entries was Schwinn, with a motorized bicycle. It looks pretty much like a regular bicycle. You notice the difference, though, when you ride it, which I did. Once you start to pedal, you get an extra push from the motor. It's a little off-putting at first but you get used to it quickly.

There are 3 levels of pedal assistance to match your riding style. There is a battery indicator on the handlebars to indicate remaining battery charge.

The motor runs in the front hub and is powered by a 24 v. battery made by Toshiba. The company claims it can be charged in 30 minutes and is good for more than 2,000 charges.

It is quite exciting to ride this bike! In the days not too long ago, the price of gas was quite high and may become so again in the future. The price of the bike is \$3,200, which is a substantial premium over a non-powered bike. In a locale like Tucson, though, you could ride it pretty much year-round.

I'm not sure where one could buy or try out one of these bikes. The company's web site has a dealer locator function, but it didn't seem to work. I couldn't find any dealers!

About: *Tailwind bicycle by Schwinn*

Vendor: Schwinn
www.schwinnelectricbikes.com/tailwind

Price: About \$3,200



iTrip Auto Universal X

One of the neat things I've been able to do for some time now is listen to my MP3 player and my CD player through my car's FM radio. There is no plug on the radio for this, but I bought a small device that transmits the MP3 or CD player output to an FM frequency. This device uses 2 AAA batteries so I always had to carry a spare set.

My device has several dip switches on the side that allow it to be tuned to any of six frequencies at the top end of the FM dial or six frequencies at the bottom end. I have to check low and high end frequencies to see which ones, if any, are available. Availability means there's little or no interference from an FM station.

When traveling, the station that works in Tucson may not work elsewhere, which means testing (again) the upper and lower frequencies to find one that can be used and, when returning to Tucson, retuning the frequency that works here. In a city the size of Tucson, there are few frequencies that are not already used.

Enter iTrip Auto Universal. This device also broadcasts the MP3 or CD player output to an FM frequency but it finds that frequency on its own. There is a scan button which, when pressed, scans the FM frequencies and stops at the first one it finds that has no or little interference which shows on a small LCD window. You then turn your radio to that frequency and listen to your playback.

When you travel and find that your station has too much interference there, scan again to find another station and tune to it. Easy!

This device is a small black unit about the size of a flash drive with a cable attached to each end. One end attaches to your cigarette lighter, the



other to the output plug of your MP3 or CD player. To find a station that's usable, press the scan button and wait the 2 or 3 seconds for it to find an empty frequency.

The unit has up to 4 presets, so you can save good frequencies for use when you travel or when your local frequency is unusable.

This unit can be used with any device with a 5 mm output jack, including most MP3 players and some cell phones, such as the iPhone. Power is supplied by the cigarette outlet.

Since my CD player requires either batteries or a cigarette lighter outlet, in order to use both it and the iTrip, I had to buy an outlet doubler, about \$15. I'll make up the cost in not having to use batteries over time.

This is a slick and very useful device, if you want to listen to your music or books on CD. The price is quite reasonable.

About: iTrip Auto Universal

Vendor: Griffin Technolog
www.griffintechology.com

Price: About \$50 direct

HeatShift™

If you have a laptop computer, you know it generates heat. If you use it when it sits on your lap, your lap gets hot. It's uncomfortable, so you put something under it, like a newspaper or magazine.

HeatShift to the rescue! HeatShift is a black pad somewhat larger than an average laptop and has a sort of quilted look. It's not very thick, but it has amazing properties!

The purpose of HeatShift is to absorb the heat your laptop gives off without heating up itself, at least not noticeably. How does it do this?

It's not refrigerated, has no wires, has no fans and never wears out. It has unique cooling crystals that cool on contact. As cooling proceeds, the crystals change from a solid to a liquid state and continue to cool.



When the laptop is not being used, the crystals change back into a solid state, ready for the next use.

I've been using the HeatShift pad for some time and have found it to be quite effective. The underside of my laptop does not heat up as it used to and the fans inside the computer don't run as often as they had.

When you compare the HeatShift against the standard cooler, you see that no power is used, no wires are involved and the laptop is cooler overall, instead of just in certain places. The less frequent operation of the interior fans prolongs battery life as well.

The pad comes in several different colors and a few sizes. Price is very reasonable in view of the very long expected lifetime of the pad.

About: HeatShift™ pad

Vendor: ThermaPAK
www.thermapak.com

Price: About \$35

iGo

This hardware device is a universal charging application for laptop computers, cell phones, MP3 players and other similar devices. There is a battery about the size of an external hard drive, several cords and a selection of charging tips.

The first challenge before charging your laptop is to find out which of the nine tips must be used to connect to the laptop. The unit comes with a card that has very small print and lists a couple of hundred laptops and which tip to use for each. If your laptop is not in the list, you can go to the company's website to look in a more extensive list.

Next you must connect the tip to the proper cord and attach the power cord to an outlet. Once connected the device shows a blue light, signaling power is available. You can charge both your laptop and your MP3 player or cell phone at the same time if you want.

iGo

The kit comes with a power cord for a wall outlet as well as a power cord for the cigarette lighter in your car. This would be handy when traveling.

I tested the unit on one of my laptops, on my Blackberry and on a couple of MP3 players. It charged each as if they were connected directly to a wall outlet. Of course, the iGo isn't of particular value when a wall outlet or computer is available, since each device has a direct charging method using such an outlet.



The real value of iGo is when you are in your car and need to keep your laptop battery charged up while you use it, or your MP3 player or cell phone needs a charge-up. I tested the iGo in my car with one laptop, my Blackberry and my cell phone. Charging proceeded as expected. It seemed to me that the laptop charging was slower than when the iGo was connected to a wall outlet, but a charge is a charge!

The company provides a two-year warranty and a 30-day money-back guarantee.

About: iGo Charger

Vendor: iGo
www.igo.com

Price: Varies: \$40 to \$140 depending on model and capabilities