

IS PORTABLE ADS-B THE TICKET TO RELIABLE TRAFFIC?

As more and more plop-on-the-glareshield portable ADS-B receivers appear on the market, the head scratcher is figuring out if these passive things can offer free traffic. Well, sort of, but with substantial limitations and technicalities. All of which is confusing and for most consumers, maddening.

From the inception, the FAA didn't like the idea of ADS-B parasites not squitting an ADS-B output. Call it a forced, buy-in government ploy if you wish, but the FAA essentially tweaked the ADS-B ground stations to only broadcast traffic information to participating or ADS-B-equipped aircraft. So a real-world scenario might go something like this: You're cruising along in ADS-B coverage and listening with your portable receiver. The ground station knows there's a traffic target that's at the same altitude three miles off your nose and converging. But since you aren't outputting an ADS-B signal as a participating aircraft, the ground station won't supply you with the traffic data.

One way around this, of course, is to install an ADS-B output transponder that squits the participating 1090ES labels. You'll also need a compatible WAAS GPS receiver in the mix. But this will require an investment far greater than the under-\$1000 price tag on evolving portable receivers.

So what about listening for and painting other aircraft that are transmitting an ADS-B output? Air-to-air traffic alerting is possible with a portable, but you'll need to get fairly close to these threats for passive alerting—seven miles, tops. That's not most folks' idea of reliable traffic minding. You'll likely do better with a passive traffic unit the likes of the Zaon portable.



Pictured above are the Sagetech Clarity (top) and Dual XGPS170 (middle) portable ADS-B receivers. Both link wirelessly to an iPad or other portable device to display ADS-B data (including traffic) and will be available around the time you read this. At bottom is the Zaon PCAS XRX portable collision avoidance system.