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Tuesday, Jul 19, 2005,  
4:34 AM EDT

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**THE GEAR HUNTER BY STEPHEN WILLIAMS**

## Keep tabs on your drinking Gadgets measure blood-alcohol levels

STEPHEN WILLIAMS

July 19, 2005

The pocket-sized gizmos pictured on this page won't play Green Day's latest, nor are they able to phone Mom from Waldbaum's and ask, "Was it Froot Loops the kids wanted, or Trix?" It won't download Yankee scores or stock quotes either.

Portable breath analyzers may not be all the rage during cocktail hour at the local country club, although Keith Nothacker, one of the country's largest distributors of them, does claim they're getting pretty popular.



"We sell to churches, schools, 'The Howard Stern Show,' and two years ago the Oakland Raiders football [team] bought a bunch," says Nothacker, chief executive of Breathalyzer.net, a Web-based retailer. "We think all consumers should have them. ... When the police give you the test, it's usually too late."

And of late, Long Islanders know that

all too well.

The aim is to stop drinkers from driving by giving them a tool that's easy to use. The simplicity factor in most of these machines - they retail from about \$50 to about \$200, with the "prosumer" Lifeloc model at \$500 - is evident. The candidate simply blows into the mouthpiece for three or four seconds, and a semiconductor sensor in the gizmo measures the alcohol level of air in the deep lungs.

The blood-alcohol content is measured as a percentage, usually in a range from 0.00 percent to 0.40 percent. In New York state, a driver with a BAC reading of 0.08 is considered DWI. Most states' limits are 0.1 or 0.08.

A look at some.

Lifeloc FC-10 (about \$500). The creme de la creme, this unit one would proudly display next to a plasma TV or iPod Photo. Handsome in silver, the FC-10 employs a fuel-cell sensor, rather than run-of-the-mill

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semiconductors, to provide a dead-on accurate reading in less than five seconds. Not only that: A potentially tipsy user can be reassured, according to the ad for the FC-10 on [www.breathalyzer.net](http://www.breathalyzer.net), that the thing is built to withstand a 3-foot drop onto pavement.

Alcoholhawk ABI (about \$100). Slightly larger than a deck of cards - isn't everything? - the Alcoholhawk is billed as "a great choice for bars, parties and social functions." Nothacker's site says the Alcoholhawk is even used by some law enforcement organizations as an initial screening device (most upscale police forces invest about \$2,000 in a Breathalyzer, he says). It features a three-digit LED display, five washable and reusable mouthpieces, and it's powered by a 9-volt battery that's supposed to be good for more than 300 tests.

Saab Alcokey. Not only will this goodie measure blood-alcohol content; if it finds the BAC exceeds set limits, the combination breath analyzer-ignition key won't allow you start that shiny new Saab. Planned for sale soon only in Sweden and expected to be available 1 year in the United Kingdom, the proprietary Alcokey will be listed under options on the car's sti and initially cost about \$400. Some drivers might opt instead to spend the bucks on an upgrad stereo and figure they can decide when they've had one too many. It's possible, though, that insurance companies would offer discounts for Alcokey-equipped cars.

Alcoholhawk Precision (about \$80). You'll need a good gulp of air and a five-second exhale to ensi accuracy in this device. Very lightweight - only 180 grams.

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