

Coke sneaks phones, GPS chips into cans

By Theresa Howard, USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Coca-Cola ([KO](#)) will announce on Monday that it is powering up a summer promotion with James Bond-like gadgetry.



Coke's cleverly disguised GPS/cell phone combos.

Coca-Cola

About 120 Coke cans are being covertly converted into a combination global positioning satellite receiver and cell phone. The lucky cola drinkers who find the high-tech cans can claim the grand prizes — but won't know when or where they'll arrive.

The "Unexpected Summer" sweepstakes aims to fuel sales for the Classic brand, which continues to struggle for sales growth. Volume for the world's largest soft-drink brand was down 3% in 2003, according to *Beverage Digest*.

"It's a big program," says Steven Schiller, group director, brand business unit, Coca-Cola North America. "It's one of the biggest we've run in years and a real cornerstone to this year's plan."

The cornerstone hinges on technology associated more with military forces — or spies — than soft drinks. Grand prize cans contain a GPS chip and antenna, a Subscriber Identity Module card that enables the can to act as a cell phone, a speaker, microphone and a panel with a keypad.

The cans, engineered by Airo Wireless, are disguised to look and feel like regular cans and are concealed inside multipacks of Coke and its caffeine-free, Cherry and Vanilla varieties. "The only real challenge we had was to take the technology we had and get it to fit into the size and weight of a Coca-Cola can," says Brian Troxell, an Airo engineer.

Consumers who find the winning cans activate the technology to call a pre-programmed hotline. They then must agree that Coke "search teams," using the GPS tracker, can surprise them anywhere, anytime up to three weeks to deliver the prizes, which include a 2005 Chevy Equinox SUV, a chance on \$1 million through Harrah's Casino, Disney vacations and home entertainment systems.

The technology tracks cans to within about 50 feet anywhere in America, and winners must carry the cans at all times until one of five prize teams around the country shows up to exchange the prize for the can. "It's all about the surprise," Schiller says.

A voyeuristic bonus: At the sweepstakes' Web site (www.unexpectedsummer.com) consumers can watch the tracking of cans that have been called in.