

How To Decide if You Should Buy a Remote Car Starter

By Charles Howard

America's love affair with the automobile, in addition to being about the call of the open road, freedom, adventure and all that jazz, has also largely been about gadgets. From the simplicity and function of Henry Ford's Model T, a car for the masses if there ever was one, for the last hundred years or so the cry has been "options!" It seems that every year another breakthrough in comfort, convenience, safety or performance makes last year's model just a little bit obsolete – though fortunately there are a lot of experts out there willing to bring even your classic ride up-to-date with all the modern conveniences.

One of the most popular gadgets to be offered on high-end new cars and now trickling down to less high-priced models as well as the after market, is the remote car starter. I have to admit, being a New Yorker and not as intimately involved in the car culture as I used to be, it took me some time and research to find out exactly why you might want such an item on your vehicle. This led me to a local news report out of Michigan, historic home of the auto industry, where expert installers at Duke's Car Stereo as well as members of local law enforcement were interviewed.

It seems that new cars with sophisticated security systems often incorporate a remote car starter as part of their whole loss prevention package. Sales of after market systems are also on the rise, and as sales reach well over half a billion dollars a year, car theft figures decline each year. The trick to the remote starter is that even if you start your car remotely, if you don't insert the key (or enter a PIN number) and try to put it into gear, the engine cuts out and will not allow you to restart it without a key. Some cars with security systems that have an engine cut off feature, for example, if the car is hot wired, make installing an after market remote starter system more difficult, which is why you need someone knowledgeable about different vehicles and systems to make sure your remote starter is installed correctly and works as it should under all circumstances.

But that still doesn't answer the question as to why you might want such an item. Well, if the weather is either too hot or too cold, a remote starter can help you make your car "just right" before you step out of the office, or the mall or anywhere else. Where ice and snow is a problem this, according to law enforcement officials, has the added benefit of helping you clean your windows and mirrors completely, thus avoiding the hazard of people driving during a blizzard with

a porthole the size of a quarter scraped in their front window. In the summer, and with our depleted ozone layer summers are hotter than ever, you can remotely start and cool your car, avoiding the risk of burning yourself on those black leather seats, or driving with your hands barely touching the scalding hot steering wheel.

As remote car starters have become more popular, special features have been added to increase their convenience and security features. Some after market models will now allow you to start your car from up to a quarter a mile away, or are linked to your car telephone, which will allow you to operate many of your vehicles comfort and convenience features, James Bond-like, from anywhere.

A simple remote starter with an average range and uncomplicated installation can cost anywhere from around two hundred dollars on up, depending on features or whether it is incorporated into a more complicated security system. When considering what and where to buy, ask around and find an after market dealer with a good Better Business Bureau record, and ask to speak to some satisfied customers, maybe even someone with the same model and year of vehicle as your own. Items that interface with your engine and moderate your ability to start and drive your car can be more trouble than they're worth if installed incorrectly. And remember to ask your insurance agent what type of security systems can significantly lower your auto insurance rates.