

# How to Shop for Car Audio Systems

By Dave Hoffman

With the ipod craze sweeping the nation, let's not forget the place we have always gone to listen to your personal music collection in private...your car. Millions of people spend hours a day in traffic with only their car audio system to break up the monotony. For some, the morning and evening commute is the only chance to relax and listen to music during their busy days. A car stereo is one of the easier ways to personalize your car, and today, there are a multitude of options to fit your convenience. Car stereos can range from less than \$50 for a simple am/fm receiver to close to \$1000 for a more advanced unit.

In addition to AM/FM stereo, car stereos are often equipped with cassette players or CD players. An adaptor is available that will attach a Discman to your cassette player enabling it to play CDs. Just make sure that the disk player has skip protection in case the road gets bumpy. Multi-disk players are also available for cars.

More cutting edge models can play MP3 disks, offering hours of music on a single CD. Most recently, satellite radio receivers for Sirius or XM systems, offering a myriad of programming choices in their radio networks for any musical taste and a variety of talk radio programs for a monthly subscription fee.

Stereos are available at any electronics store, and most stores will install the unit for an additional cost. There are also specialty stores that only sell car stereos. Unfortunately, choosing a car stereo is more than a simple matter of preference. Different car models have different compatibilities, and all units may not fit in your car. Choosing a retailer with highly trained staff can be valuable. Whatever your preference a car stereo specialist can help you select the right sound for your taste and make sure it is installed properly. Make sure you have the make and model of your car on hand when you shop.

Car stereos have different features that may appeal to different tastes. How often do you listen to the radio? If you are a channel surfer, you may want a model with more presets and a scan feature, enabling the unit to find local radio stations. This is useful for long trips where the radio stations change often.

There are also a number of options depending on your listening style. Are you an audiophile' sensitive to the slightest details of tone and balance. Do you just want some tunes to sing along to, or are you a news/talk radio junkie? Car stereos can come with sophisticated equalizers for

those in the know. For those with more simple preferences, some have presets for different kinds of musical atmospheres, labels like “jazz,” “concert hall,” or “hard rock.”

You can also do a lot with the actual output equipment – the amplifiers and speakers – by installing high quality amplifiers and subwoofers. Subwoofers are the speakers that amplify the loud bass sound creating the booming sound that some cars emanate. Only certain speakers can handle a sound that is that low. A “crossover” is a device that separates different frequencies and sends them to the speaker best suited for them. It is important to have speakers that can handle the kind of sound you want to listen to, and this is an area where a skilled sales representative can be useful. Most cars can generally fit speakers in a variety of places within the vehicle.

Leaving your car stereo in plain view can be an invitation for your car to be broken into. To minimize the risk, some radio models are easily removed so the owner does not have to leave it in an unprotected car. Some car stereos have removable faces meaning that the front of the radio can be removed and taken out of the car leaving the radio itself useless. Other models have a face that turns around at the flip of a button, making it look like there is no radio there. The advantage is the convenience of no removable parts to carry around and keep track of.

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