

Expert tips for buying car a stereo

Choosing a car stereo system used to be a relatively easy process. Ten years ago, virtually all systems were eight-track tape players with basically the same degree of quality and options.

By today's standards, these systems were consistently less than mediocre in sound reproduction and durability.

The major determining factor in selecting a car stereo at the time was which brand would look better.

Remember the amazing technological features those early units offered?

Some players would automatically change tracks at every other pothole. Some

could devour a tape — especially your favorite — and of course there was that ever-popular option of playing two or even three tracks simultaneously.

A great deal has changed in the car stereo industry during the last 10 years.

Manufacturers now treat car stereo systems with the same amount of concern and engineering know-how that they use with their topflight systems for the home.

As a result, car stereo components have been elevated in quality to state of the art standards. Systems including advanced electronic AM-FM stereo cassette tuners, power amplifiers,

graphic equalizers and top quality speakers are now available and can cost well over \$1,000.

Times have changed and with these changes has come a need for the consumer to accurately determine which products in which price range will best suit his needs.

Dave Robin, technical services manager for Jensen Sound Laboratories, a manufacturer of car stereo speaker systems, says, "Many people are intimidated by the whole process, particularly those who are unfamiliar with stereo products in general. They are afraid they will end up buying a system

that costs too much or provides disappointing sound."

Robin suggests that a thoughtful blend of common sense and very basic knowledge will go a long way in shopping for a car stereo. Most importantly, let your ears — not price tags — help you decide on a system. Choose components that sound good to you.

For most people a system including AM-FM stereo cassette receiver and speakers is quite adequate.

Those with sophisticated tastes and larger budgets may select from a wider assortment of electronic equipment such as graphic

equalizers — control consoles that allow the operator to "shape" music to his tastes by accenting or downplaying various frequencies — or power amplifiers to allow a closer reproduction of concert hall sounds.

A receiver should provide "clean" sound with good FM reception and a high quality tape playing mechanism. Features to look for include Dolby-R noise reduction, loudness contouring that accents lower frequencies at low listening levels, local-distance switching that improves FM reception with varying signal conditions and separate bass, treble, left-right and front-to-rear

speaker balance controls.

In selecting speakers, be sure that they are matched to the power output and impedance of the receiver and will fit the cutouts provided for speakers in your car's interior. For smaller cars, two speakers in the front doors are usually sufficient for sound.

In larger cars, install four speakers: two 6.5-inch or five and one-fourth inch models in front doors and two 6x9-inch oval speakers in the rear.

The rear speakers will enable you to create a top quality sound environment particularly if you choose a three-way speaker system

80 percent of U.S. drivers are severe

More than 80 percent of the country's motorists are tough on their cars because the bulk of their driving consists of short trips around town.

Additionally, about half of the drivers in the United States mistakenly believe that driving less to conserve fuel also means less maintenance is required.

These are among the findings of national surveys conducted by Fram Corp. on the driving and maintenance habits of American motorists.

In one survey, the driving styles of 2,100 motorists in cities across the country were analyzed. The second survey studied the car maintenance habits of 1,000 drivers in 10 cities.

The results show that approximately 80 percent of the surveyed motorists generally drive distances of 10 miles or less each time they start their cars — a condition that owners' manuals call "severe" driving.

Severe driving is defined as short, stop-and-go trips, extensive idling as in heavy traffic, towing heavy loads or driving in areas that are cold, very humid, have steep hills or heavy concentrations of dust or pollutants in the air.

"Contrary to popular belief, stop-and-go driving, not highway driving, is severe operation that puts 'hard miles' on a car," says William Rolland, vice president of engineering at Fram.

"During short trips, car engines never have a chance to warm up to temperatures that normally boil away harmful water vapor and unburned fuel. As a result, condensation and sludge can form in the oil, causing engine wear that can lead to a costly overhaul," he adds.

The most efficient operating speeds are those achieved on the highway. However, the surveys show that only about 18 percent of

the motorists questioned do most of their driving on the highway.

Adding to the wear and tear American motorists place on their engines is the belief that less driving means less maintenance. Approximately 50 percent of the drivers surveyed thought that less frequent service is required when driving is reduced.

"Many people have been conserving fuel by driving less or traveling short distances — more stop-and-go driving which means more hard miles. Therefore, drivers should pay more attention to their cars' condition, not less," explains Rolland.

To counter the effects of such driving, he advises frequent preventive maintenance checks to keep cars healthy and fuel-efficient.

"This is particularly important for drivers with small, four-cylinder cars," he adds. "The strain of severe driving is greater in these cars, because small engines must work harder and therefore run hotter, causing the engine oil to break down and lose its protective properties."

Rolland recommends that severe drivers change the oil, and oil filter approximately every 3,000 miles or two months, whichever comes first.

Approximately 75 percent of the surveyed motorists change their oil at the recommended intervals. However, about one-third said they do not always change the oil filter each time they replace the oil.

"The oil filter should be replaced with each oil change," explains Rolland. "If not, up to one quart of dirty oil can remain in the filter and contaminate the fresh, clean oil."

He also recommends yearly tune-ups to prevent damage from severe riding conditions.



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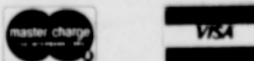
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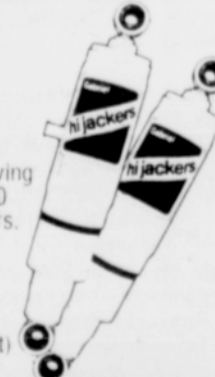
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