

Car Audio Buyers Guide: The Basics

Introduction

A quality audio system certainly makes drive time more enjoyable. If you are new to the world of car audio remember that you can have better sound than the factory system. And the process is not as difficult as you may think.

Goals

What is the best system for you? The answer is the one that best meets your goals and needs. Do you simply need to replace a unit that has died? Do you just want a better sound without distortion? Do you want to add new features like a USB port, Bluetooth® or satellite radio? Or is your main goal having a system that is louder than all your friends? And of course most people like to keep their budget goal in mind.

So, ask yourself, “What do I need, or want, and what is my budget to hit my target”?

Budget

Everyone knows the expression, “*you get what you pay for.*” In car audio, points to consider are the actual construction of the product and the number of features included. (Check online reviews for product quality and reliability.)

In the receiver, a.k.a. the head unit, you may want a CD or DVD player, multiple RCA outputs to add an amplifier, the capability for HD Radio™, or even water resistance. Check the product feature lists to find a model that has the features that meet all of your goals and budget.

Speakers, subwoofers, and amplifiers are also available in a broad price range.

For a tight budget, simply upgrading your speakers is a great first step for better sound. Most speakers installed at the factory are made of paper and other cheap materials to save on cost. In addition, they actually deteriorate with age. The sound quality has been degrading little by little over the life of the vehicle. Aftermarket speakers are made of higher quality materials for better sound and long life. You will be pleasantly surprised at the difference new speakers will make.

The most cost effective way to upgrade a system is to install the components yourself. There are plenty of how-to articles and videos online to help you out. However, if DIY is not your thing you can take the components to a MECP professional audio installer, or local mechanic (ask about prior car audio

installation experience). Keep in mind the costs for a professional to install your new system as you look at your overall budget.

Key Concepts For Aftermarket Audio Installation

The aftermarket audio industry has adopted standards that greatly simplify upgrading your audio system.

Head units from every major manufacturer are built to a standardized size. DIN is the designation for sizing. Head units are designated as Single Din or Double Din.

DIN size	Width	Height	Depth
Single DIN	7 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (178mm)	2 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (50mm)	NA
Double DIN	7 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (178mm)	4 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (100mm)	NA

Vehicle dash openings come in different configurations compared to the standardized sizes of aftermarket products. A dash kit is used to modify the receiver to DIN specifications. These kits are produced of high quality materials and blend nicely into the factory dash.

In addition to the standardization of head unit sizes, there is an industry standard for the colors used in audio wiring. The color codes used on aftermarket car stereo connector harnesses conform to the E.I.A (Electronics Industry Association) standards. These colors often differ from the non-standardized wiring colors used by vehicle manufacturers. For the most part, simply match the wire colors when assembling the connectors. Wires are joined by using simple crimp-type butt connectors or by soldering (best method). Always refer to your stereo owner's manual for specific wiring details before making any connections.

Modern vehicles have much more digital technology than the "good ol' days". Many features, such as steering wheel controls, are not simple switches but use more sophisticated electronic signals to communicate with the receiver and/or the vehicle's onboard computer. No worries. Interfaces are available and simple to install that allow the various electronic components to "talk" to one another so that your steering wheel controls, warning chimes, or OnStar continue to function normally.

And as for speakers, many aftermarket speakers will fit directly into factory openings. If not, inexpensive adapters are available to adapt them to the factory openings.

Know Your Vehicle

Before you begin to order audio components it is a good idea to know a few details about your vehicle.

Check these points to ensure you get everything you need on the first try...

- ✓ Know the year, make, model, and sub-model of your vehicle.
- ✓ What kind of system are you replacing?
 - Basic (*just* a head unit)
 - Mid-line (head unit plus remote factory amp and/or a remote CD changer)
 - Premium (Name brand like Bose or Infinity)
- ✓ Special features.
 - CD or DVD player
 - OnStar
 - SWC (steering wheel controls)
 - SiriusXM
 - Warning chimes
 - Navigation
- ✓ Speaker locations and sizes (see the VolAudio guides or check the speaker manufacturer's websites for correct fitment)

Now You Are Ready!

Now that you are armed with a little knowledge...

- ✓ Choose a receiver with the features you need.
- ✓ Check the guides for the dash kit, wiring harness or interface you need (*make it simple and order as a combo kit*).
If you get stuck call 1(844) 302-8346, Ext. 1 and a friendly Customer Service associate will help you out.
- ✓ Choose optional add-ons...
 - Tool kit and guide for first-time installers
 - Speakers
 - Subwoofer
 - Amplifier
 - Back-up camera
 - Etc.

In a few days you can enjoy your new audio upgrades...

- ✓ Better sound!
- ✓ Better features!
- ✓ Better driving!