Designing the Perfect Car Stereo System

There are many different ways to design your car stereo system. The first thing to remember is that every person that you talk to about car stereos is going to have a different opinion about which equipment to buy, and what is the best way to design your system. The best way to build your system is to do research. By reading articles like this one you can get an idea of what it is you like. In this article I will try to walk you through the process of designing your own car stereo system. I will point out the places where your own taste comes into play, and hopefully you can design a system for you.

The first step to finding your perfect system is figuring out which pieces of car stereo equipment you want incorporated in your system. Figure out how many speakers or amplifiers of each kind you need. Once you know how much equipment you need, it is good to know which brands to buy in order to get your money's worth. Where to buy the equipment is key in getting good equipment and saving money. Installation is the final step in building your system, and it is an important one. Installation can greatly affect the sound quality of the entire system, regardless of the quality of your equipment. For example, you could spend thousands of dollars on the top of the line equipment, and by simply running your power wire from your battery you could cause tremendous distortion in your speakers. Throughout the article I will be describing my perfect car stereo system. Remember that although my opinion is a well researched one, it is still an opinion.

Finding a System that fits your Needs

There are many kinds of car stereo equipment that you can add to your car stereo system. Each piece of equipment performs a different task. Everyone wants different functions performed by their stereo system. Some people don’t like loud base, and therefore wouldn’t need sub-woofers. Others want to bump as they drive around, and they don’t care what the music sounds like. These people wouldn’t need to spend money
on nice mid range frequency speakers. There are people who like to listen to CDs and would need a CD player. Then there are people who don’t want to spend that much money and they buy tape decks instead. People with trucks usually don’t want remote controls, while people in cars probably would. The idea is to find the equipment that suits you. It is almost impossible to have every component in your car, besides most people find many car stereo parts useless.

My ideal stereo system would start out with a good CD player. In my opinion CDs are much easier to handle, and they produce much better sound quality. “Tapes will never vanish, they will just become obsolete like records.” (Norton 92) It was also a prophecy by Norton in his article that CDs could eventually be replaced by laser discs or DVDs. A CD player seems like an excellent choice, since CDs are the most accessible form of music around. I would want a CD player with a remote control, so that people in the back could control the music. I enjoy loud base, but I am not a person who likes to show off their system. I also want the sound quality of my music to be perfect. This means that I will buy sub-woofers, but probably spend just as much money on high and mid range frequency speakers. Many people have a hard time spending the same amount of money on a three-inch diameter speaker and a twelve-inch diameter speaker. But if it is quality you are looking for that’s what it takes. Amplifiers are very important, if you want your system to sound good at all. You can run some speakers form your deck, but I wouldn’t. In fact the deck I would purchase doesn’t come with speaker outputs, only pre-amp outputs. The lack of speaker outputs allows better sound quality form your amplifiers. I would run one amplifier for every two speakers.

So far these items have been your normal selections. The uniqueness of my system comes out in the CD changer and voice activation. Almost no one buys a CD changer over twelve discs. Pioneer is the only company to even make a changer larger. Pioneer makes a fifty-disc changer, the only one larger than the typical twelve-disc. This changer was on the market for a year or so, and then was taken off of their inventory
sheet. I did some checking around on the pioneer web page for details on this, see pioneer on the works cited. The pioneer web page had a lot of good information. To find out about the fifty-disc changer, I had to e-mail the company. The address is on the web page. They replied that the product worked well and was still for sale by special order. They said that people weren’t willing to give up that much space in their car for a fifty CD changer. They said that most people don’t even have fifty CDs in there car, and if they did they didn’t like having to sort through fifty CDs to find the one they wanted. This is where the next unique piece of equipment comes in. Pioneer also makes a voice recognition box for your CD player. With a voice recognition box fifty CDs would be no problem to handle. All you would need to say is something like “play Bob Dylan, track five,” and it would play your song. We have covered all of the specific equipment that we need, so how much and which kinds do we need.

**Quality of Equipment**

Good equipment selection is important. Where do quality and price overlap? All stereo equipment has four different levels of quality each with its own price range. First you have your really cheap stuff. Like Wall Mart gold painted six by nine’s, wrapped in plastic for six dollars and fifty cents a pair. The next level is the one that most people who aren’t into car stereos are familiar with. This is the equipment that they sell in Circuit City, The Good Guys, and other places like these. It is decent equipment, but you usually don’t get any of the extras. The next level is the equipment that you find in car stereo stores. These stores have the lower models like the ones in Circuit City, but they also have the top of the line models of the same decks with all of the extras. The highest level of quality equipment you have to order directly from the company, either on your own or through one of the car stereo stores. This stuff brings a whole new dimension to stereo equipment. In my opinion you can’t hear the difference in the expensive stuff anyway.

Let’s talk pricing. The price difference between the equipment in Circuit City and
the stereo stores isn’t much. You are really buying the same stuff just one is the model with more options. Usually the equipment even looks the same. For Circuit City’s best CD player you can pay three to four hundred dollars. For a CD player that looks the same with a few other key features, you can pay six to seven hundred dollars at a car stereo store. For car stereo equipment this price difference isn’t much, and it is definitely worth the money to get the better CD player. You can find cheap CD players at Wall Mart for seventy dollars. And you can order CD players from manufactures for two to three thousand dollars. Speakers and amplifiers all follow this same pricing system, just in there own price range. For my equipment, I would get the higher quality stuff from the stereo stores. For example the six to seven hundred dollar CD players are the best quality for your buck.

**Purchasing the Right Equipment**

There are hundreds of brand names on the market. Most of the brand names you will find has a good line of high quality equipment. Some of the best sellers, and probably for good reason are Sony, Pioneer, and Kenwood. You will pay a little more for Sony, probably just for the name. In my opinion Pioneer has just as good of quality equipment for a little cheaper. I don’t like Kenwood much due to some bad experiences I have had with their equipment. For high and mid range speakers, Sony has had the best in there class for the last five years. For decks and CD changers Pioneer has dominated the field for the last year or so. For sub-woofers Boston Acoustics or JL Audio give the highest quality base. The most important components are amplifiers. I would buy nothing less than Rockford Fozgate amps. Rockford Fozgate has continuously made the highest quality amps for years.(Henson, 33)

Now you have an idea of what kind of equipment to buy, and you have an idea of what you want in your car. So, Let’s talk about the details of what you should buy. The CD player that I would get is the Pioneer P1R. This is pioneer’s top of the line deck. It comes with every feature that any other deck has plus some. The P1R only has pre-amp
outputs, so you have to run amplifiers to every speaker. Amplifiers cost a lot of money, but they are definitely worth the cash. As I already talked about, I would run Pioneer’s fifty-disc changer and their voice activation system. As far as I know, Pioneer is the only company to make these particular products. A common misconception with car stereo systems is that more is better, more speakers, more base, more power. This is not the case. Krutchfield’s 1998 best car stereo system of the year went to a car whose only base was produced by one twelve inch sub-woofer, hooked up to one five hundred watt amp. It won due to its excellent sound quality. The car had thirteen other speakers integrated into its system, but this was it for base. Good quality comes from how you combine your sound.(Jenson, 88) Personally I would put two JL Audio twelve inch sub-woofers in a dual ported Band Pass sealed box. This box is for ultimate sound quality. For high and mid range speakers, I would buy a Sony component set. The set would consist of two six and a quarter inch mid range speakers, two four inch mid-high range speakers, and two detached one inch tweeters for excellent high range sound quality. The Amplifiers that I would get would be made Rockford Fozgate. I would get one two-by-two, hundred and fifty-watt amp to power my sub-woofers. As well as one two-by-one, hundred and twenty five-watt amp to power my six inch mids. I would use one four-by-one, one hundred watt amp to power my four-inch speakers, and my one-inch speakers. There are many different places in the car to set everything up. The only way to find the best places to put everything is to listen to other car stereo systems, or try your own combinations.

This about does it for my stereo system, and what I would recommend you to buy. Remember that it is only my opinion, and while most people familiar with car stereos would say this is an excellent system, they would definitely want to make some of their own changes. So go shop around, read some more on the subject, and above all have fun designing your own system.