

Tech-it-Easy

Car infotainment & CarPlay



Almost all cars now have infotainment systems – from affordable hatchbacks to top-end luxury cars.

Once the preserve of high-end and luxury cars, infotainment systems are now available in almost every model of car on sale. These all-in-one setups usually incorporate several different digital functions into one unit, granting you access to information and entertainment services while you're on the move.

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- Traditionally, the only electrical device slotted into your car's dashboard was nothing more than a radio and a CD player – maybe a satellite navigation system, if you'd really splashed out. However, as our desire for in-car gadgets has increased, car manufacturers have been happy to oblige.
- As these systems have become more all-encompassing and complex, they have started to provide information to the driver, as well as entertainment. Hence, the term 'infotainment' was born.
- Regardless of how many screens are used, they all connect to the same infotainment system and have mostly the same functions.
- Generally, your infotainment system can be accessed through a screen in the middle of the dashboard – invariably, these screens use touchscreen controls so you can navigate their various menus. More recent models have taken to adding even more screens, often replacing the driver's dials with a screen, or putting one or two displays on the rear bench for back-seat passenger.

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- **Sat nav** – this system uses GPS satellites to work out exactly where the car is on the planet and plot that position on a map. From there, it can work out the fastest or most direct route for you to take to a destination, and track your live location every step of the way. Many cars still include a built-in sat nav system even though smartphone mirroring means they're now a little redundant
- **Bluetooth phone connectivity** – this allows your phone to connect wirelessly to your car. Bluetooth supports several different functions including hands-free calling with the audio going through the car's built-in speaker and microphone, or messaging with your texts being read out via the infotainment system

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- **Smartphone mirroring** – you can think of smartphone mirroring as a much more advanced version of Bluetooth that allows you to access certain apps from your smartphone through your car's infotainment screen. The most common mirroring systems are Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and most manufacturers include these for free in their infotainment systems. This is handy because it means you can now access sat-nav directions from your Google Maps app, for example, without needing a system built into your car
- **Entertainment** – there's a huge choice of options when it comes to accessing entertainment through your car's system. This can include using a music streaming service via your smartphone, or playing MP3 files from an external storage device. A handful of older systems still include an old-fashioned CD player, if you're still clinging on to your albums. Some advanced infotainment systems include television, movie and video game services, but these are normally reserved for passengers or when in park for safety reasons

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- **Radio** – compared to the cutting-edge technology that powers many infotainment systems, the built-in radio can seem a bit antiquated. However, if you prefer to get your music and info via the airwaves, this function can be found in your infotainment system. The majority include DAB digital radio as standard
- **Car functions** – modern cars have lots of functions that can be accessed electronically, and the infotainment system is usually where you interact with them. This can include selecting and editing the car's driving modes, accessing performance or efficiency information, or even opening boot lids or glove boxes on some models

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- **Digital services** – as infotainment has become more popular, several adjacent services have appeared to feed convenient information directly to the car's screen. This can include systems to find you a parking space or a charging point if you're driving a plug-in vehicle, or services that can find nearby restaurants and even book you a table

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- Some infotainment systems include the ability to be upgraded over time, either with better performance or with added functionality. The traditional way these upgrades were distributed would involve the carmaker plugging a laptop into your car at the same time as you got it serviced.
- The latest infotainment systems, however, utilise what are called 'over-the-air' (OTA) updates. These are similar to the apps on your phone, which get periodic updates downloaded and installed over the internet. Tesla is well known for using OTA updates and has, in the past, added games and extra functions via an online update.

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- **Common infotainment brand names include:**
- *Audi – Connect*
- *BMW – iDrive*
- *Ford – SYNC*
- *Mercedes – MBUX*
- *Peugeot – i-Cockpit*
- *Tesla – Infotainment System*
- *Vauxhall – IntelliLink*
- *Volkswagen – Composition/Discover*

Android Auto

- Android Auto is similar to Apple CarPlay, except it works with smartphones that use version 5.0 or later of the Android 'Lollipop' operating system. There are many compatible Android phones including those by Samsung, LG, HTC and Google's Nexus and Pixel phones.
- Once Android Auto has connected to your car's infotainment system, it presents your Android apps onscreen so that you can make calls, play music, find directions and check the weather safely while driving. There is a wide range of apps available including everything from Spotify and Skype to Amazon Music and Audiobooks.
- Like Apple CarPlay, Android Auto can be controlled by voice commands so that you can keep your hands on the wheel and eyes on the road while driving.

