

# Let's Talk Car Radio Tapes

By John Booth

For almost as long as cars have become the mainstay of ever day transport some sort of musical device was sure to follow. In 1933 Laurel and Hardy did an amusing skit where an 'in-car entertainment system' (wind-up phonograph) was fixed under the bonnet of their car and operated by a pull cord.

Fast forward to the 1950's and heavy valve radios were the in thing for cars. They were AM radios and used a 'vibrator' system to step up the voltage to run the vacuum tubes. These radios were not only very expensive to purchase but also incredibly heavy, bang went a few engine horses to run and cart them around. By the mid to late 1950's car radios were moving towards transistors. Valves or vacuum tubes were on their way out. The transistor radio used both AM (Amplitude Modulation) and FM (Frequency Modulation) frequencies. The race was now on to produce a cost effective radio with good reception. It is here the Japanese took the lead in car radio production in particular the Sony Corporation.



*His Masters Voice valve radio from a Rover P4 90.  
Stealing 4 amps at 12v when the amp was just idling*

**When buying a car radio most people look for performance...and price.**



**Maybe that's why over half the car radios in South Africa are Supersonics.**

**MODEL AR 107**



SPARTAN. 5 Wave-bands (F.M., B.C. and 3 S.W.) 4½ watts output. Switch-in automatic frequency control. Fitted as original equipment by car manufacturers. R95.00.  
MODEL AR 107. The car radio with five pre-selector buttons. Crystal clear reception on 2 F.M. and 3 B.C. bands. R79.50.

**SPACE-KING**



SPACE-KING. World-wide reception. Concert Hall sound. F.M., B.C. and 9 S.W. bands. Bands spread on 8 S.W. bands. Switch-in Automatic Frequency Control. R129.50.

**AUTOPORT**



AUTOPORT. Top performance both in and out of your car. Locks into the car magnetically. Out of the car it's a fine portable. 4 bands (B.C. and 3 S.W.). R79.50.  
Prices include full custom-built installation kit.

*Early 1970's Supersonic transistor car radio advert*

One of the problems with all radio is that you are forced to listen to broadcasts from radio stations. Tough if you do not like the song they are playing and could not fast forward it to the next one. Sure you could change channels, but you were still restricted to what they pumped out. Then in the mid 1960's came the revolution of the 8 track tape.

The 8 track tape lasted from the mid 1960's through to the

late 1970's. Finally now you could buy a tape of your favourite bands and play it all day long. It would play continuously in an endless loop. They were not without problems though. They would jam as the tape got dirty. If left in a hot car the sound quality would deteriorate. Often the tape would stick together causing it to spool out of the player onto the floor of the car, but progress never the less.



*Inside of an 8 track tape, The tape is pulled off the inner part of the reel then fed back onto the outside, giving continuous playing*

Imagine now you are in your MK1 Ford Cortina adorned with STP and Gunston stickers. Away from your dad shouting at you to turn that racket off. You are on the open road, a radio station is playing Chirpy Chirpy Cheep which you are sick and tired of (your mom still likes it). So you switch on your 8 track tape player and out comes Led Zepplin Whole Lotta Love blasting through your 5w speakers. Man you have made it in life!!!



*The famous STP sticker*





1975 Advert for Sanyo radio tapes.

Note both the 8 track and the cassette tapes are on offer. Also note the Rally radio. Very sought after by collectors

Then along came another break-through in the form of the cassette tape. The cassette tape was invented by Phillips but improved by TDK. They appeared commercially in car radio tapes in the early 1970's with most manufacturers offering both the 8 track and cassette tape options. The cassette tape soon took over the market with the 8 track being slowly phased out. Being much smaller than the 8 track tape it could hold up to 120 minutes of music. Instead of 1 reel like the 8 track tape it had two reels, so was reel to reel. It was called a 4 track or cassette tape. Being 4 track essentially meant it was 2 tracks on each side of the tape. The tape was then split into two to get the stereo recording. The tape head would pick up these two tracks simultaneously but play them through left and right speakers. In essence half the musical instrument sound would come out of one speaker and the other half out the other speaker. Hence stereo sound. Unlike the 8 track, the cassette tape could be rewound so you could play your favourite song over and over again.

# ISOLATED?

HITACHI is the best travelling companion a car can have. Keeps you lively instead of lonely. News Flashes, Weather Reports, music to suit your mood. Business travelling or weekend driving ... take HITACHI with you.



**Keep in touch 24 hours a day with HITACHI**



KM 1600 S De Luxe FM/MW/SW1/SW2 (25-90 m). Preselect car radio. Variable tone control. Fits neatly into or under your dashboard. Multivolt 6/12 v +/-.



KM 1450 SA FM/MW/SW (31-90 m). Three station indicators. Push button tone control. Fits neatly into or under your dashboard. Multivolt 6/12 v +/-.



CSK 218 IC FM/MW car radio with stereo cassette player. In dash or under dash mounting. Auto and manual eject.

Guaranteed and serviced throughout the country by:  
**KATZ INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION (PTY) LTD.**  
 Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Kimberley, Bloemfontein.



*Early 1970's advert by Hitachi*

TDK Japan led the way in magnetic tape production at the time and made huge improvements to the recording quality of cassette tapes. Cassette tapes were



*Cassette Tape. Invented by Phillips, perfected by TDK*

small enough to put in a pocket yet held so much information. A true leader in their day.

To impress your friends, you had not one cassette tape storage box but a few in your car. These would be tucked under the seat or on the floor and maybe a few in the boot. Stored in the cubby hole would be the proverbial pencil.

Dirty tape rollers had this nasty habit of winding tape around themselves. The only indication of this was when the singer's voice started to slow so using your mom's favourite song, the words Chirpy Chirpy Cheep would become Cheerpy Cheeeeeerpy Cheeeeeeeeeeeep then the tape would come to a halt (thank the



Gods). Swift action was needed here to eject the cassette tape before the rest of the tape was damaged. The cassette tape would come out followed by a length of twisted tape. Time to get the pencil trick out and using the pencil to rewind the tape back into the cassette tape being very careful that it went back in without being twisted. Once the tape head and rollers were cleaned we were back in action with the pencil stored for its next tape rescue.



*The proverbial pencil trick*

Cassette tapes would inevitably stretch with use, age and heat, and as such the singer's voice would also be stretched out. Sadly the cassette tape was now at the end of its life and the last song it played was probably 'There Will Never Be Another You', so time to say good bye my old friend. The disposal of the tape was generally assigned to the passenger who would snap off one end of the tape, wind down the car window and while in motion throw the cassette out the window so that it unravels at high speed before the other end gets snatched out of his hand. These were used to adorn the sides of many highways and trees. So if you had a C60 tape you could get 88m of road side length. More impressive was the C90 tape which gave you a Whopping 129m of shiny road side length.



*Mid 70's advert for a Blaupunkt radio tape*

So what do you look for when choosing a period radio tape? My preferences are those radio tapes from the late 1970's and through to the 1980's i.e. before the CD player. These radios have analogue amplifiers and not digital amplifiers. Avoid radios that are locked and need a code to get them to work

again like Grundig. Despite them being a very good system they had an anti-theft locking system. Once locked they are near impossible to unlock.



*Grundig. Good system but near impossible to break the locking code.*

Don't fall into the myth that some makes were better than others. Back then there were only a handful of component manufactures. So you paid for the name because generally inside them all were the same components. Also don't be fooled by the weight of these radios in that the better quality radios are heavier than the cheap ones. Some manufactures added extra steel to give the impression of weight equals quality. Condition is very important; you don't want a battered radio that is missing its buttons. Don't be too concerned if the tape side does not work. You don't need it unless you have some cassette tapes from your youth.

There are other ways of playing your music. Any of the good makes will do like Pioneer, Sony, Tedelex, Alpine, Sanyo, Jensen, Phillips and so the list goes on. Look for one that has a CD input jack but still a radio tape. This way you can attach an MP3 player via a 3.5mm cable. If this is not available then you can still use an FM transmitter with a flash drive that plugs into your cigarette lighter socket.



*FM Transmitter and 16 Gig flash drive that plugs into the cigarette lighter socket*

I fitted this Tedelelex radio tape into my Ford Escort mk1 together with a pair of Sony 6\*9 speakers. The speakers I mounted in the rear side panels. The radio tape has a CD input. So I can play either via an MP3 player or through the FM Trasmmitter. Both give exceptional sound quality, far exceding the quality I get in my modern car with its digital amplifier.



*Tedelelex radio tape with CD input I fitted to my Ford Escort*



*Sony 6\*9 speakers giving exceptional sound quality*

In conclusion you will not beat those old analogue amplifiers for the true warm sound of the music. People of today just don't know what they are missing. If I

had my perfect system it would be a radio player with an analogue amplifier that does not distort at high volume. In addition I would like the music to be stored on a medium that is compatible or better than a cassette tape. With MP3 storage you lose that clear warm and true sound that you used to get with an analogue cassette tape. So don't be afraid to fit a period radio tape, you will be surprised with the sound quality. Link it up to a pair of Sony 6\*9 speakers, mount these in the doors or parcel shelf, avoid speaker boxes if you can, wrongly designed they can sound terrible. Then sit back and listen to that analogue amplifier. The best sound ever produced!!!