

MUSCLECAR RADIO MADNESS

CLASSIC AUDIO SYSTEMS FOR YOUR CLASSIC



1969 Mustang OE AM Radio

In this article, we are going to discuss the different options you have when you are considering upgrading the original sound system in your classic musclecar. Many musclecar restorers are really caught between the proverbial old rock and a hard place when they want to upgrade their factory sound system that doesn't seem to quite measure up anymore. While many enthusiasts don't care what the stereo looks

like when mounted in the dash, many original classic car owners do. In other cases, some car affectionatos may want to completely hide the new CD or cassette player, but use the original radio and speaker locations as they are. Everyone has a different idea of what will work for him or her for their classic's sound system. Let's see what all the noise is!

Basic Radio Options

Most musclecars usually came with either an AM or AM/FM radio as an option. While some cars were ordered with a radio delete, most of these cars were destined for the race track or drag strip and are really not the norm of what you will find on the street. If you happen to only drive the car on Sundays and put only 1000 miles or less on the car a year, you may want to leave the radio alone and just keep things as they are. You may also build or purchase a trailer queen and want to show the car at a car show. If the car is judged at any car show in an original or restored class, you will need to keep the original radio in the car or you will lose judging points consistently until you install the correct radio for the car.

If you just want to have a nice looking car and want some cool tunes from more than just a basic AM/FM radio, your options can seem endless. The primary consideration you need to consider here is exactly what look you want to maintain inside the car, how much power for your stereo you need, and what media, such as CD/DVDs you will want to use in addition to a radio. There are really only four options that relate to your classic radio. The first or most basic radio option is to keep the stock radio in the dash and live with it as is. The second option would be to just swap out the factory radio and replace it with whatever unit you choose from your local car stereo store. The third option is to keep the stock setup and then wire a new stereo into the existing wiring but locate the new components in the glove box, under the front seat, or in the trunk. The fourth option would be to have a specialty audio company build a new audio system for you by sending them the original radio and then specifying what new components you want added to the old system. Let's discuss these four options in greater detail.



1969 Chevelle OE AM-FM Bluelight Radio



1965-67 Corvette OE AM-FM Radio

Option 1: Leave the original system in the car

As mentioned before, sometimes if you have a Concours- restored musclecar or just don't have the money to spring for a new stereo system, you should leave the factory system in the car. Factory AM and AM/FM radios do play well and in later years, the sound systems continued to improve somewhat. Another trick to improve the sound of the stock stereo is to improve the speakers of the system. You should

only improve those speakers that cannot be seen when the car is being judged. This way, you can improve the quality of the stock system without compromising or losing points on a judging field. We will discuss speaker options later. The bottom line here is by leaving the car alone, you can save lots of money, but that is not always the most traveled route to having more fun in your classic ride.

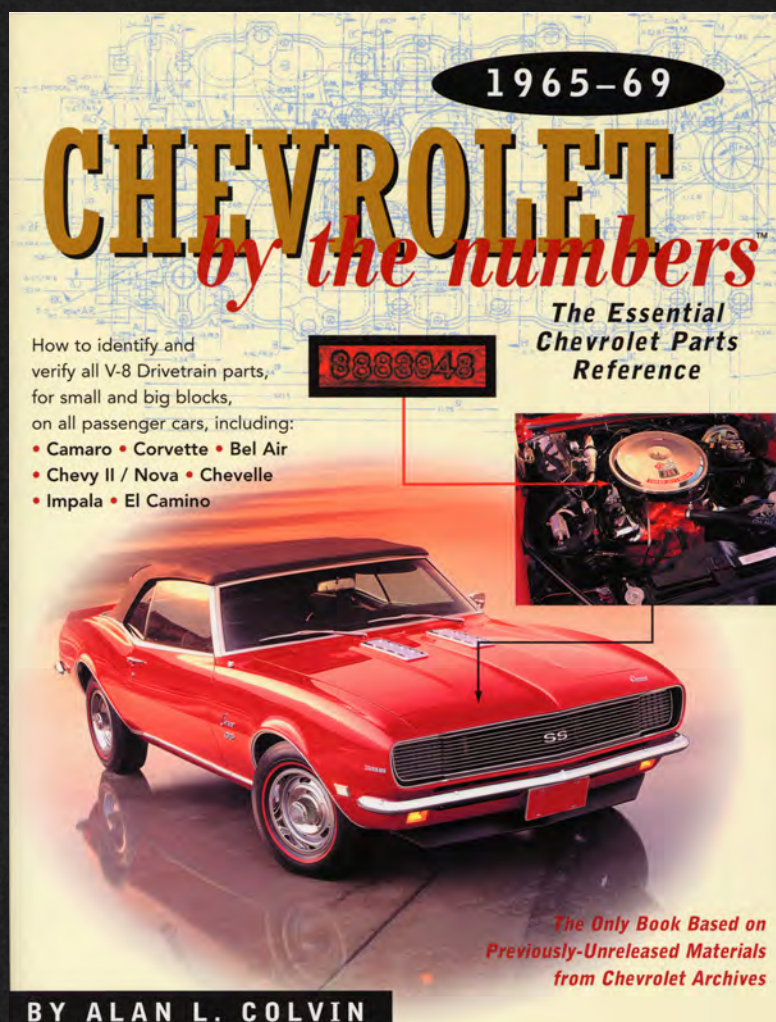
Option 2: Install a High Performance Audio System

The second option would be to remove the factory system from the car and then replace it with whatever system you can afford. After-market stereo systems are sold in various audio stores and chains across the country. There are probably also many reputable local car stereo outlets in your area too. Most of these stereo stores also have full-time installers that can install any audio equipment in your ride for a small fee. The stereo options you have in these places are almost endless. In some of these larger stores, there are literally hundreds of in-dash stereo units on the walls to choose from. These units can also be united with speakers that are usually nearby and can be heard as a complete system prior to installation. The pricing structure for aftermarket stereos can range from a couple hundred dollars to several thousand dollars, depending on how educated your audio ear has been trained and what equipment is added to the base unit. There are now trunk mounted multiple CD/DVD players and large amplifiers that are optional to many

in-dash stereo units. Many of the in-dash units are digital in design and are remote controlled just like your TV in your living room or your garage door opener. The choice usually comes down to the size of your wallet that particular day.

These stores also sell and install the large bass reflex speakers that the younger crowd seems to enjoy. These speaker systems can sometimes be heard several blocks away. While this loud music is not appreciated very much in residential areas and with there now being police ordinances against such behavior, the current trend for these types of systems has not waned in recent years. Most musclecar owners who keep their cars close to the factory appearance do not equip their cars with these types of systems and speakers, since the mounting of these systems can produce holes in trunk floors and excessive wiring all through the car. But it is still a free country and everyone has their own freedom of expression of how their car is to look and sound.

Chevrolet by the Numbers: 1965-69



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Option 3: Secret Audio Systems

Within the last several years, a new movement has begun. It can sometimes be referred to as the “Secret Audio System” movement. In reality, it is simply the addition of high quality stereo equipment in hidden places within the car.



1970 Corvette OE AM-FM Radio

This also includes newly designed high performance speaker assemblies that still use the factory positions in the package tray and front kick panels or door panels. I personally like this option as it maintains the stock radio appearance but hides all the components to your stereo system in convenient places like under the front seat, in the glove box, or remotely controlled in the trunk area. This is an awesome option as far as safety is concerned, especially if you leave your car parked in local parking lots for long periods of time. This option may not work for the true Concours- restored musclecar, due to the fact that these cars will be inspected in the glovebox and under the front seats. If the killer stereo system is hiding there for the judge to find when he inspects the car, you will lose originality points for that system being in the car. If you just want to maintain the stealth look and not have the car judged, this is probably the best option for you. The same systems are available as in the Install a High Performance Audio System segment above. If you choose to have the system installed, you just have to explain the stealth installation to the installer so he gets it correctly positioned in the car to your satisfaction.



1957 Chevrolet Aftermarket Custom Autosound Radio

Option 4: Custom Sounds

The forth option available is to contract with a specialty audio company to build a new audio system for you by sending them the original radio and then specifying what new components you want added to the old system. This option is very popular for those people who want a top of the line stereo with the digital tuning and all the

other features of a current stereo in their original looking vehicle. Only 1 or 2 companies build most of these units in the U.S. Most of these stereos are designed to fit almost every vehicle from 1948-82, fits most factory faceplates perfectly, as well as takes into account the amount of space that is available behind the dashboard so the unit will fit properly. You can

buy a 100+ Watt AM/FM Stereo with an optional CD/DVD changer that is controlled via buttons on the stereo for less than \$600.00...and it looks like it is a factory job. There are also digital units available with fake faceplates that flip out of the way that really look correct as well. Some of these units are also built to control other manufacturers CD/DVD units such as Kenwood, Panasonic and others. There are also stealth units in which the receiver/amplifier is hidden somewhere in the car and a separate LED display unit on a 9-foot cord is mounted somewhere

else (like in the glovebox, ashtray, sunvisor, etc.) in the car. There are two remotes available with this system. A RF Radio Frequency wireless remote control can be used to control the system from as far away as 40 feet. A less expensive option is the InfraRed remote control, which can be used to activate and control the stereo system through the LED unit while inside the car. An optional 6-disc CD changer can also be added for even more sound options. Any way you look at it, this option looks pretty good.

Speaker Knowledge

The type of speakers you install in your classic car can either make or break your ride. If you need to keep a stock appearance, this somewhat limits what choices you have in audio speakers for your car. You can always just stick with the factory-type speakers, but that option will not appeal to most classic car owners. The next option is to maintain the factory position and size but upgrade the speakers with an aftermarket speaker. For example, most of the early Chevrolet owners go this route unless they are having the cars judged. The options are endless for almost any musclecar and there are literally dozens of companies out there that will supply you with a factory replacement speaker. The primary consideration is the amount of wattage the stereo is producing and the speaker will reflect that. As mentioned before, you can also add the large reflex speakers that are located in the trunk but that usually requires drilling holes in the trunk floor to securely mount these massive speakers to the car. Another option is the new back seat kits which mount two 8" woofers and a 200 Watt amplifier behind the back seat with no modifications necessary (i.e.: drilling) to mount the kit in the trunk. This system can also be taken

in and out of factory restored cars with a little ingenuity in the attachment of the kit to the factory wiring inside the trunk. Any way you look at it, there are tons of audio options to make your classic musclecar a more enjoyable ride. It just comes down to the type of car you have, the size of your wallet, and possibly a little American know-how. See you out on the road !!!



1969-72 Chevelle Aftermarket Kenwood Radio



1969-76 Corvette Aftermarket Kenwood Radio

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