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Gear4 CarDock FM "Follow Me" transmitter

Your in-car audio solution?

by Paul Lester published on 17 October 2008

If you're not willing or able to invest in a more permanent way to listen to an iPod through a car stereo then your best option is to pick up an FM transmitter. Experts are often reluctant to recommend such devices due to problems with interference and signal quality but for a cheap and cheerful solution they may be the best option.

Gear4 attempts to rectify some of the problems with these devices with its new iPod range, which features "ClearSearch" and "FollowMe" technology to help improve performance.

The former automatically scans the FM channels in your current location and picks out five of what it decides are the clearest channels to use, automatically storing them in preset memory locations. These can be switched through by using the up and down arrow controls so when you start to hear the signal breaking up you can quickly move to another station.

The "FollowMe" feature is a clever idea and provided you have an RDS radio with AF technology it's supposed to retune your radio for you to the station you've just switched to via the transmitter. The RDS compatibility is also supposed to show track information scrolling across your radio's display and if all this worked perfectly it'd make for an extremely good system.

Hence the reason why we're using words like "supposed" in our description, as after driving about for a few hours with the CarDock FM we encountered a fair few problems.

To begin with the design of the device, which features a cigarette lighter charger to provide power and keep your iPod charged could cause some users problems. The charger stalk, while flexible, is pretty short so unless your cigarette



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lighter is mounted flush to the dash and has plenty of room either side you may have to buy an extender to fit it.

In terms of performance it takes about a minute to scan the FM range, at which point you're shown the current frequency and must manually tune your stereo to match it. Much like most FM transmitters, audio quality varied from clear to questionable and we wouldn't say it's any better than most of the other (far cheaper) models out there.

The "Follow Me" feature, along with the RDS transmission of track information to the car stereo display is something we can only describe as "glitchy". Some of the time the stereo changed to the new frequency within a few seconds and other times we were left listening to static for minutes at a time before getting frustrated and retuning manually. The track information also seems to display in some situations but not others, with no apparent reason as to why.

VERDICT

The CarDock FM is a tidy set-up and it's nice to have your iPod held firmly in place to make it easy to adjust on the move, though this is really dependant on the position of your cigarette lighter charger. The headline features would certainly prove useful if they worked consistently, but considering you're paying quite a bit more for Gear4's transmitter on this basis it's not really something we can recommend.

At a glance

What is it?

An FM transmitter with some fancy features

Good

Potentially tidy setup, displays track information, charges iPod

Bad

Headline features don't always work properly, expensive

Verdict

If Gear4 were to sort out the "Follow Me" and RDS display functions the Cardock would just about be worth the money, but as it stands there are far cheaper and equally capable devices out there

Price £49.99

Our score

6/10

Your score

?/10