

Review: Motorola Roadster a Win with FM Transmitter

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I've been looking for the perfect in-car hands-free Bluetooth system for awhile now. I've never been a fan of earpieces and while a couple of car kits have managed to impress, the Motorola Roadster covers just about everything, including some "special needs" of my own.

My car has only a CD player, so the only way I can listen to content from my iPhone in the car is through an FM transmitter/charger that hooks into Apple's proprietary port at the bottom of the phone. One of my biggest gripes with most car kits is that they don't take into account the fact that some people are piping their smartphone's sound through an FM transmitter.

For example, BlueAnt's S4 is the only truly hands-free unit I've run across and I like it a lot, but if I want to stay paired and listen to Rhapsody or Audible on my iPhone, I'm limited to listening to them through the S4's tiny speaker. It's simply not a seamless experience for a smartphone that's pushing sound through an FM transmitter. Enter Motorola's Roadster with integrated FM transmitter.

It's a 2-birds-with-one-stone solution that Motorola arrived at with the Roadster, a hands-free car kit that clips to the visor. While it's not a pure hands-free solution – you still have to press a button in order to activate the iPhone's native voice commands – it manages to be one of the most impressive solutions I've tried for the money (\$69.99 new on Amazon.com).

As I said, the most notable feature of the Roadster is the built-in FM transmitter. The FM transmitter allows users to stream all audio from the phone through the car stereo, including calls that are routed through the Roadster. It's akin to some of the factory-installed solutions with which the newer car models are being equipped these days, except the Roadster doesn't carry the ridiculous \$800 price tag you'll find on this kind of product at the dealership. It's not a new concept, but Motorola has pulled it off with flying colors here.

The Roadster has four buttons – two allow you to control volume (up and down) and search for available FM frequencies, one is for power and the other allows one-button access to your music library. The fact that calls go through the car's stereo helps when you're talking about call quality. Things sounded great through four speakers and the in-device speaker is ample if you don't wish to use the FM transmitter.

While the manual warns that "audio broadcast to your FM radio may be heard by other radio," I'm not so worried about someone hearing that my wife needs a gallon of milk from the grocery store.

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Battery life was relatively good, and I liked the fact that there was a physical, sliding on/off button for when you're out of the car. So often these days, the lack of this kind of button leads to uncertainty and eventually a dead battery.

The problem I've outlined here is rather specific to my needs, but I'm betting I'm not the only smartphone user out there with a factory-installed CD-only stereo system dependant on an FM transmitter (who puts tape decks in cars anymore?). Given my gushing here, it's probably not necessary to say that the Roadster is about as good as you're going to do in the sub-\$100 in-car hands-free space.

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