HOLE FILLERS

What is wrong with factory fitted car speakers? Driving Sounds investigates

I have to admit I am quite proud of the front cover image for this issue of Driving Sounds. It encapsulates through the medium of photography, the difference between a set of speakers designed to optimise the listening pleasure of a music loving car driver and a collection of tin and paper designed to fill a hole and last hopefully, until the vehicle warranty runs out.

This year, we intend to show these very speakers to anyone attending events that we will be at throughout the summer. Visitors will be able to compare the marked difference in engineering and build quality by holding examples of these and reasonably priced aftermarket speakers in their own hands. We hope to dispel the far too commonly held myth that because a car cost a lot of money that the very best has gone into every element of its being. We have some fantastic examples of how car owners are being at best, misled on a daily basis and at worst, conned into "upgrading" to something that in many cases is no better or even worse because a boardroom deal has been struck behind the owners of a car brand and the owners of a popular hi-fi brand.

I do not wish to be taken to court by any litigious, all-powerful multi-national company and will avoid referring to specific badges or names. You will however, be able to identify many of these by looking us up at an event and rummaging through the piles of audio detritus we have accumulated. Some of these carry very prestigious names indeed but their prestige is based on anything other than the performance of the speakers they fit.

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A speaker designed to sound good will offer some very obvious physical pointers toward their efficacy. Take a look at the basket or chassis. Now, there is nothing wrong with using pressed-steel to make a speaker chassis provided precautions are taken to minimise any resonant frequencies. The chassis has to be physically robust as any flexing is going to divert energy away from the business end - the cone. Cone shape and material are important as sound results from a movement of air. Good sound results from moving air with great integrity. If the cone is flimsy, as it moves it will change shape causing distortion. As mounting positions in the majority of cars are designed for aesthetics alone, then something has to be done to enable the car passengers to hear the sound that is often being fired at their knees or even at the floor. An obvious dispersion device at the centre of the cone will help a little. Finally, the motor assembly needs to efficiently convert electrical impulses into physical movement with the minimum of loss. This is achieved by using optimised materials for magnets rather than a bit of old iron and also incorporating a significantly-sized voice coil. Once you know what to look for, it is easy to see the difference.

Last year, with our BMW AB comparison, we were able to demonstrate how easy it is to hear the difference between good sound and the utilitarian, industrial squawk emanating from most production vehicles. I for one cannot wait to see your jaws drop when you see some of the rubbish we find in very expensive cars, masquerading as "upgraded car audio." ▢