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Why Are Automakers Dropping AM Radio?

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When the BMW i3 arrived in the US more than 8 years ago, it lacked a traditional AM radio. It took hackers about a year to find a way to tweak its software so that they could have an AM radio and extended range. When questioned about it, BMW said: "AM is not offered due to negative performance influences of the electromagnetic interference of the electric drivetrain. Electric motors cause interference on AM which is why BMW decided to remove this option."



Radio waves are still a great way to communicate during emergency situations, and it would be a shame to see companies phase them out. In fact, U.S. Senator Ed Markey is pushing back against carmakers who have plans to stop including AM radios in their vehicles.

There are two camps and two explanations for the lack of AM radio on European electric vehicles to date. The most popular line among European EV manufacturers is that it's due to electromagnetic (EM) interference, while Europe is also in the process of shutting down analog AM broadcasts. Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) transmits more stations with better quality for much less money, which helps explain why a lot of the remaining AM stations are in Spain, the UK, Ireland, and Greece.

European automakers still say that EM interference is the reason they don't include AM radios in electric vehicles, with the exception of Mercedes. In some countries, the band has enough listeners to warrant the inclusion of AM radios; however, U.S. legacy automakers still do include them, while Tesla and Rivian do not, and Fisker and Lucid do. The Ford Lightning F-150 just came out with AM radio - but it's only a matter of time before they get rid of it too. It remains unclear whether Stellantis' coming products will include AM radios in the U.S., after Fiat 500e does not have one installed in its vehicles anymore.

"Despite innovations such as the smartphone and social media, AM/FM broadcast radio remains the most dependable, cost-free, and accessible communication mechanism for public officials to communicate with the public during times of emergency ... Although the auto industry's investments in electric vehicles are critical to addressing the climate crisis and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, automakers need not sacrifice the benefits of radio in the process.", said Senator Ed Markey.