

Preparing an SD Card for a Car Stereo

John Kormylo

I can't say whether any of the following is true for **all** car stereos, but it is certainly true for many.

When you connect an SD card to your computer (if your computer doesn't have a SD card slot, one can purchase a USB interface for about a dollar) it will be treated as an external hard drive and should already be formatted. Your car stereo will be able to handle the file system with several important limitations.

The stereo will list files in the order they were written. What this means is that you should keep a complete copy of the SD card on your computer. To make any changes whatsoever, one should delete the entire contents of the SD card then copy it back from the computer again.

All music files should be at the same 'level.' If you normally organize music files by genre/artist/album/song then **every** MP3 or WMA file should be 3 folders deep. Since I like to organize classical music by genre/composer/title/movement, trying to fit music without movements sometimes requires adding an extra folder (I use "Singles"). Failure to follow this rule will cause some of your music files to be inaccessible by selection or when restarting.

To prevent starting a slide show of every jpeg on the card you should also remove any cover art. These are stored as system files and are normally hidden. The only way I have found to get rid of them is to use Windows XP to show hidden files and delete them manually. Newer versions of Windows will never show cover art files and will copy them into any other folder into which you copy music. You can ignore the warnings about deleting system files; cover art is not **needed** for anything.

When selecting songs from the menu, only the first 20 or so letters of the name will be visible. When WMP rips a CD, it names songs using the artist, album, track and title, so file names like **Herbert von Karajan; Richard Strauss Eine Alpensinfonie; 01; Richard Strauss Eine Alpensinfonie Movement I (Nacht Sonnenaufgang)** are both common and useless. I would rename it simply as **01 After Sunset (Alpine Symphony)**. The track/movement number comes first to keep them in order, followed by enough of a description to remind one what is being played. The complete file name will be displayed using a text crawl when the song is played, so adding some additional information can be edifying even though it will not be visible while selecting.

It should be noted that all this and more is stored in each MP3 or WMA file, which is what is normally displayed by an iPod or WMP. One can also access (and modify) this information by right clicking the file and selecting **Properties**→**Details**. When ripping a CD this information is not always correct. Older CDs have less information than newer ones, so WMP (for example) searches a database on the internet for album information. But the database is not complete, so sometimes one must use the album insert to correct this information as well. Of course, this will not affect a car stereo which only uses file names.

Finally, it is possible to have more files than the file system can handle, at least for my car stereo. This can happen well before the SD card is full, so anything over 16Gb is a waste of capacity.