

BMW does about-face, drops CarPlay annual subscription requirement



Enlarge / A BMW X7 navigating an off-road course
Eric Bangeman

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When you buy a new car, you *own it*. Make the payments, and the car is 100 percent yours, with the only standing relationship between you and the carmaker consisting of scheduled maintenance. BMW broke that model when it decided to sell a

software subscription along with its new cars, forcing buyers to pay \$80 per year for continued access to CarPlay in cars that support Apple's in-car infotainment interface.

As first reported by Autocar, the German automaker has decided to get rid of the subscription fee *and* make CarPlay standard across most of its lineup. In addition, BMW will offer support for Android Auto, in a first for the company.



Enlarge / iDrive on a 2019 BMW X4, which offers Wireless CarPlay support.

BradleyWarren Photography

“BMW is always looking to satisfy our customers’ needs, and this policy change is intended to provide them with a better ownership experience,” a BMW spokesperson told Ars.

In the United States, CarPlay will be free for all 2019 and 2020 BMWs that support the technology. Autocar says that, outside the US, some BMW owners may need to pay an additional £235 for a lifetime subscription; BMW USA was not able to shed any light on this arrangement. It’s not immediately apparent why this is the case, as Apple has pointed out that it does not charge OEMs for CarPlay.

If you’ve got a newer BMW with CarPlay, you can log into BMW’s ConnectedDrive portal to check on your subscription status. Although BMW says the rollout process may take “several weeks” to complete for folks registered via ConnectedDrive, you won’t need to pay anything additional to use CarPlay in your BMW.

With the latest iteration of iDrive, BMW actually has one of the better infotainment systems on the market. It's customizable, has a smart layout, and is easy to use. But sometimes the built-in options aren't good enough, especially when it comes to navigation and music. I'd rather use Waze or Google Maps when I need directions, and if I'm listening to songs on my phone or a podcast, native controls are better than any infotainment system. CarPlay and Android Auto certainly have drawbacks, but their biggest advantage is that anyone who owns an iPhone or Android phone can figure out how to use them with a minimum of fuss.

Best of all, BMW has joined the growing number of carmakers that have made CarPlay and Android Auto standard, instead of charging a few hundred dollars for the privilege of using your smartphone with a non-crappy interface. Now if only everyone would get on board with doing that for driver-assistance tech...
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