

GM kills more than CarPlay support, it kills choice

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A long while back, Toyota told me it didn't want to give up interior real estate to Apple's CarPlay. The automaker felt that losing that space to the tech company would be a huge mistake. Fast forward a few years, and after what I assume were some internal struggles, it caved and now you can get CarPlay and Android Auto on your fancy new Highlander, Prius, Tacoma, or Camry. It seemed like a silly decision had been reversed. Now it's GM's turn to go down the same path.

Today, news dropped that GM would be phasing out CarPlay support in future EVs. In its partnership with Google, it hopes that all the features you get from mirroring your iPhone can be replaced with an Android Automotive feature. GM, like Toyota before it, wants to control the digital real estate in its vehicles. It's a revenue-based and walled-garden (ironically against Apple) decision that will cost them.

Software-driven vehicles should be about choice. Instead, GM is making a short-sighted decision based on a trickle of revenue under the guise of better integration. Owning all the data that a vehicle generates while driving around could be a great source of cash. The problem is potential customers have become accustomed to choosing which device they use to

navigate, chat, text, and rock out within their vehicle. They've grown weary of being mined for data at the expense of their choice and they're really not all that keen on in-car subscription services.

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For years, automakers have been sharing their vision of a future where cars can drive themselves, and the passengers are kept entertained by a plethora of features that are meant to keep their attention as they roll without worry to their destination. If in this far-off future, a person were to get into their vehicle and be restricted from using their service of choice—CarPlay in this scenario—why would they even buy that vehicle? What's the point of telling people that, in the future, they can use whatever they want if, as a company, you don't let them.

GM's move is based on its desire to offer tighter integration with navigation and other in-car systems. Charging along routes isn't really possible within projected versions of Apple or Google Maps in many vehicles. That's a solid reason for GM to make its mapping solution better. It's not really a reason to reduce the choices it offers consumers. Yes, GM will offer Spotify, but if you use Apple Music, you'll have to use Bluetooth, which means now you're picking up your phone to make choices, and that's far more dangerous than using the projected version of Apple Music on a vehicle's touchscreen.

There's also the loss of apps that GM might never want in its vehicles. Alternative EV route planning apps, navigation apps, messaging apps that read messages and support voice-to-text replies, podcast apps, and anything available now that GM and Google will determine they don't want being offered to drivers.

Will this decision hurt Apple? Sure. But what it also does is damage GM's reputation and potentially its bottom line because it gives people who are part of Apple's ecosystem (for better

or worse) pause when they are shopping for a vehicle. The news could be that GM is phasing out CarPlay support for EVs, but the average person sees “GM is killing CarPlay.” As a result, they look elsewhere.

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This decision is particularly weird when new players worked hard to make sure their vehicles support CarPlay. Polestar may have taken longer than expected to bring CarPlay to its vehicles (something automotive journalists pointed out repeatedly), but it finally delivered. Lucid just announced that CarPlay is landing in its Air sedan and will be part of future vehicles. Both these automakers saw what the market wanted and delivered.

The software-driven vehicle revolution should be a place of choice. If the hardware can handle it, automakers can deliver it. GM is extremely proud that its Hummer EV has Unreal engine support. I’m not sure if people were clamoring for intense graphics for drive modes, but hey, you can get that now with a GM product. What I do know is that many people use CarPlay. It’s easy to set up and use, and more importantly, it’s familiar.

Nearly every modern vehicle supports CarPlay, making it easier for folks to move from vehicle to vehicle without learning a new UX while behind the wheel. That’s a huge win for safety.

GM sent over a fact sheet about its decision that states:

“This go-forward strategy will help us intensify our focus on designing the best integrated infotainment solution, reduce complexity and feature duplication, continuously innovate by adding more features and apps over time, and manage the overall in-vehicle experience in a more holistic way.”

This sounds like good news. But it doesn’t have to come at the expense of what people already use and, in many cases, prefer. GM should create a better infotainment system that’s better

integrated into the information coming from the vehicle, but it should offer its customers a choice. Because if GM doesn't listen to what people want, plenty of other automakers are more than happy to swoop in and offer CarPlay support.

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