Eight-Track Tape Encyclopedia Article

Eight-Track Tape

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Eight-Track Tape

In the 1960s, the eight-track tape player was an ambitious attempt to employ magnetic prerecorded tape in a convenient format for use in home and automobile stereos. The eight-track was signifi-cant evidence that Americans now demanded music while they travelled and that the automobile had become a place to experience entertainment. By the early 1980s, however, the eight-track became a symbol of obsolescence in audio technology and an artifact of 1960s and 1970s nostalgia.

In the 1960s, several manufacturers developed tape cartridges as a format for recorded sound. The Lear Company, a manufacturer of executive jet airplanes, produced a continuous-loop cartridge with four sets of paired stereo tracks—thus the name eight-track. In 1964, representatives from Lear approached Ford Motor Company with a plan to introduce this format into automobiles. People wanted to select their own music to listen while travelling, and the eight-track tape was convenient for the driver because it could be inserted into the player with one hand.

Ford equipped millions of automobiles with eight-track players and millions more were manufactured for use in home radio/phono-graphs. Although the eight-track format became a major format for pre-recorded popular music in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not an entirely satisfactory product for the user who could not record on it and found it difficult to access selections. By the end of the 1970s, the eight-track tape had been overtaken by the compact cassette and dropped by audio manufacturers and record companies.

Further Reading:

Kusisto, Oscar P. "Magnetic Tape Recording: Reels, Cassettes, or Cartridges?" *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society.* Vol. 24, 1977, 827-831.

Millard, Andre. *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound.* Boston, Cambridge University Press, 1995.