

SOFTWARE OPTIONS

As far as software goes, Windows XP tends to be the main choice for an operating system, although some people prefer Mac OS or Linux. On top of the OS, you simply install a CarPC application. Favourites include: MediaCar (highly skinnable, very powerful and with excellent support for GPS applications); Media Engine (well established, excellent for MP3 playback, but with limited GPS support); and CarBox (a relatively new UK offering, which supports Destinator and has a very straightforward interface).

There are quite a few good GPS mapping programs around, but not many are designed directly for use in a car environment. One option is Microsoft Mappoint, which is

basically Autoroute with a developer's interface to control it from another application. Another is Destinator, which is well known in Pocket PC circles but is also available for the PC. Version two is currently available, but version three is in development and promises plenty of new functions plus some excellent 3D views. Again, Destinator can be controlled from another application, but because it's expensive, not many people buy it so it's not always supported by CarPC software developers (who mostly do it out of sheer love). MediaCar and CarBox currently support both of these GPS applications. Media Engine only supports MS Mappoint, although development for support of Destinator is currently underway.

WEB LINKS

www.letscommunicate.co.uk/carpc/
www.digital-car.co.uk
www.mp3car.com
www.thisstrife.com/carproject/
www.opussolutions.com
www.destinator1.com
www.routeplanners.co.uk
www.mini-itx.com
www.cpc.com
www.cartft.com
www.mediaremote.com
www.girder.nl



7 Now to install the system in the car. You'll doubtless have excess cables to stow, along with items such as USB hubs. Space behind the dashboard can be useful here, but be aware of heating or AC elements and don't put anything in there that may be a potential fire risk.



8 If you put your machine in the boot, you'll need to supply power, audio, video and USB feeds to the rear of the car. Ensure you separate the power cables from the audio feeds to prevent interference. You may want to use a mains three-pin socket and plugs so the system can be quickly removed.



9 You don't want your equipment to move around while you're driving. The easiest way to prevent this is to use Velcro, which sticks to the carpet or another strip of Velcro. The cables are then tied and secured underneath the carpet for neatness.



10 Buy a VGA screen rather than a composite monitor, as it'll be able to display higher definition images. Visit www.dashmount.co.uk and pick up one of their custom brackets to quickly and securely mount your screen (you may need to modify the mounting clamp that comes with your screen).



11 Ensure your GPS receiver is compatible with your intended application. eBay is a good source of USB GPS units, which, when used with a USB hub in the dash, make things easier in terms of cabling. If your car has heat-reflective film in the windows, this can affect the quality of the signal.



12 You'll need to program your remote control or touch-screen LCD to operate your CarPC software. We recommend using Girder (www.girder.nl), which uses scripts to replicate key strokes when you press buttons on your remote control or tap your touch-screen LCD.



13 If you have a high-specification car radio, it might have an auxiliary port (possibly left and right phono plug leads), which is the best way to get sound in to your system. Failing this, buy an FM Modulator from eBay for £25-35 – it's easy to connect and all you need to do is tune in your radio.



14 There are several options for powering your system, but it's widely recognised that the power supply from Opus Solutions is among the best. It controls the startup and shutdown of the system, as well as maintaining a stable voltage.



15 Once your new system is complete, ensure you perform maintenance on it as with any PC, and back up everything just in case it crashes or gets stolen. Finally, remember to be safe – it's neither sensible nor legal to watch the latest DVD release while driving down the M6!