



The Evolution of Sound: Corvette Radios

When the 1953 Corvette was introduced, it came with two options: heat and an AM radio. Since that time, technology and desire have made radios a large part of the Corvette experience. Cool cars and cool music just seem to go together. Mid America Motorworks takes a look at the changes that have made sure your favorite songs were always available for every cruise.

Radio Terminology

There are a handful of words associated with radios that are either second-nature or have fallen out of use due to changes in technology and time. Here is a selection of radio-specific terms.

- **Radio** – The radiation of electromagnetic energy through space to carry information. Includes a transistor radio and a speaker.
- **Stereo** – A sound system that produces the effect of listening to the original sound. Includes a radio and two or more speakers capable of playing different sounds so that it seems to surround the listener and to come from more than one source.
- **ETR** – Stands for Electronically Tuned Radio. This radio is tuned across a part of the radio frequency spectrum using a specific voltage or digital code.
- **Conelrad** – Stands for Control of Electromagnetic Radiation. Conelrad was implemented in 1951 as a way for the US government to contact the public in the event of an attack during the Cold War. A round dot with a triangle in it was displayed on the radio viewer. In the event of an attack, listeners could tune their radios here for updates and instructions.
- **CB** – Stands for Citizens' Band. It refers to a device that uses a range of radio frequencies that people use to talk to each other over short distances, often while driving.
- **8-Track** – An 8-Track Tape was a magnetic tape sound recording technology that was popular in the mid-1960s to the late 1970s.
- **Cassette Tape** – The next progression of magnetic tape sound recording, Cassettes came with music on them or blank to be recorded by the purchaser.
- **CD** – A Compact Disc, or CD, contains recorded music and was widely used beginning in the 1990s.
- **DVD** – A DVD or Digital Versatile (formerly Video) Disc is a larger format for storing more music and other media.
- **MP3 Player** – Stands for Motion Picture Experts Group - Layer 3. An MP3 Player is a device capable of storing hundreds of digital audio files.



C1 Corvette Radios, 1953-1962

While the radio was listed as an option in the first Corvette, all of the 300 cars made for that model year came with an AM signal seeking radio. The Delco Radio brand transistorized car radio used both vacuum tubes and transistors in its radio circuitry.

- 1956:** The 9 Tube Wonder Bar Radio was used in Corvettes. The touch bar contained no writing, the tuning indicator was white and the dial face showed the Chevrolet Bow Tie emblem.
- 1957:** The Wonder Bar Radio used 10 tubes. The touch bar contained "Wonder Bar" writing, the tuning indicator was white and the dial face showed the Chevrolet Bow Tie emblem.
- 1958-1962:** A 7 Tube Wonder Bar Radio was used for the end of the 1st Generation. The face of the push buttons was flat and the model number could be found on a paper tag on the outside of one of the radio covers.



C2 Corvette Radios, 1963-1967

All C2 Corvettes ordered with a radio continued to be fitted with chrome-plated ignition shielding that covered the distributor to reduce interference. The radios used in Second Generation Corvettes featured a paper tag on the outside of the radio cover with the model number.

- 1963:** Model #985396 Wonder Bar was offered at the beginning of the year, and used until they were gone in the spring of 1963. The usage overlapped with the introduction and installation of the AM/FM radio, model #985686.
- 1964:** The AM/FM radio is introduced. The dial face shows AM in red and FM in green.
- 1965-1967:** On this AM/FM radio, the dial face shows AM and FM in a dark, almost black color. However, when lit, the face actually shows in green.



C3 Corvette Radios, 1968-1982

Little change occurred until the introduction of magnetic tape sound recording technology in the mid-1960s, allowing enthusiasts to choose what songs they listened to and when.

- 1968:** First model year that stereo was an option for the AM/FM radio.
- 1977:** First model year with the 8-Track Tape player as an option.
- 1978:** Introduction of the CB radio. This was also the last year for the mono radio.
- 1979:** The previously optional AM/FM radio in stereo became a standard feature of the Corvette. This was also the first year of the Cassette Tape player as an option.
- 1981:** The CB Radio option was offered with the choice of 8-Track, Cassette Tape or just CB. All radios except the U85 were new-style Delco radios with ETR. Radios featured a digital station tuning readout and built-in clock. On some radios, the quartz instrument panel clock was replaced with an oil temperature gauge.
- 1982:** This was the last year to have an 8-Track player as a factory option.





C4 Corvette Radios, 1984-1996

As technology advanced, the Corvette radio saw several changes in the Fourth Generation. Tapes made way for CDs and standard features were once again updated.

- 1984:** A Delco-Bose Stereo was offered for the first time. This was also the first year for the Radio Delete option, which meant the Corvette was delivered to you arrived without a radio. Owners with the Radio Delete option actually received a credit on their base price.
- 1985:** This was the last year for the optional CB.
- 1988:** The only radio options were Delco-Bose or Radio Delete. This was the last year for the Radio Delete option.
- 1989:** A base AM/FM Stereo was included with the base price. This was the last year of the C4 to offer the cassette without the optional CD/cassette combo.
- 1990:** First year for the CD/cassette player combo option. One exception was that the ZR1 Corvette was offered from the factory with the CD/Cassette player combo.



C5 Corvette Radios, 1997-2004

As CDs gained in popularity, the need for Cassette tapes diminished, but radios remained relatively the same otherwise.

- 2001:** Cassettes became standard features and owners received a credit on their base price.
- 2002-2003:** The UL0 Cassette option was only available if combined with the U1S option for a 12-disc CD changer.
- 2004:** This was the last year of the Corvette to offer a Cassette player.



C6 Corvette Radios, 2005-2013

- 2005:** This was the first year to introduce the MP3 player, DVD player and Navigation options.
- 2006:** XM Radio is first made available for Corvette owners.

C7 Corvette Radios, 2014-2016

In 2014, Bose introduced 2 new systems for the Stingray. The standard 9-speaker Bose System was available, as well as an add-on of an extra speaker in the trunk. Using the latest technologies, Bose was able to offer live rock-concert-level volume without audible distortion.

Another feature designed for optimal sound, the AudioPilot compensates for background noise to reduce the effects of sounds like the rumble of the engine and convertible top-down driving.

C7 Corvettes also include a Pause Radio feature that works similarly to a DVR. Owners can pause live radio and listen to it when interruption is over.

