Installing a Double Din Multimedia Car Entertainment System
into a 2003 Saturn Ion
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This story began when I had my car battery changed. When I bought the Saturn, I set the security code to my bank pin number. After I changed banks, I forgot the old pin number and forgot to reset the security code. It turns out that with GM radios of that vintage, it is less expensive to replace the radio than fix it.

Removing the old radio is straight forward. Pry open the dash trim near the air vents and it pops right off. The only tricky bit is removing the flasher switch (only the small white plug comes loose). The radio is held in place with two hex bolts.

Shopping for a new radio I found that most of the models were not compatible with a 2003 Saturn Ion for reasons unknown. Presumably this had something to do with odd opening in the dash trim. Anyway, the Ouku was not on the excluded list, although it should have been.

Make sure any adapters you get are intended for your car. Fortunately, Amazon is getting better at that all the time. The Saturn antenna plug fits into the radio perfectly, so no antenna adapter is needed. I used the **Metra 70-2002 Radio Wiring Harness for Saturn 00-05**.

The original radio for the Saturn has mounting brackets attached to the sides using four flat head screws per bracket. I detached mine and fastened it to the new radio (shown below). I was only able to use two of the screws per bracket, but that should be enough. If you do not have the original radio, you can use the side brackets off the **Metra 95-3106 Double DIN Installation Dash Kit for Most 2000-2005 Saturn Vehicles** (but not the front trim, which doesn't fit). Actually, the adapter does a better job of covering up the gaps on the side of the radio.

The radio came with no installation instructions, except for the color codes for the wiring adapter. Fortunately, the Metra adapter uses the same colors, more or less. There are several ways to wire the two plugs together, but I prefer using butt connectors (see below) and a crimping tool. I also prefer "tinning" the wires with solder and trimming the ends to 1/4 inch, but that's just me.
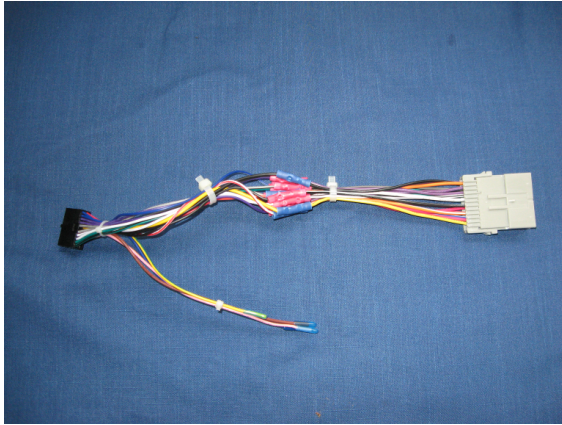
There were two black wires from the radio and one black and one black-with-white-stripe wire from the car. They are all grounds, so I wired them in pairs (by thickness). There were three red wires from the car and only one from the radio. I actually ran all three into one end of a butt connector, but in retrospect I could have chosen one at random and end capped the other two. Presumably they all go through the same fuse.

I hooked up the wiring to the car by itself first to make sure the car would still start and no fuses blew. Then I connected the other plug to the radio and repeated the test, plus turning the radio power on. Finally I hooked up the antenna and bolted the radio into place (see above). Make sure the plastic pins go through the guide holes before tightening, and be very careful not to drop the bolts as they may wind up under the carpet behind the dash.

The big problem was when I tried to close the trim. The bottom fit closely, but the top of the radio was hitting the top of the opening. This was also the case when using the adapter mounting brackets. Fortunately, it wasn't that difficult to remove part of the top edge of the opening until both the trim would fasten and the CD door would open and close (see below). I also had to file down the bottom a little to keep it from rubbing.

After some experimentation, I discovered I got many more satellites by placing the GPS antenna on the dash than on top of the radio itself. There is a plug on the driver's side through which you can run the cable.

I spent a lot of time setting the radio presets before I noticed there were 24 available (18 FM, 6 AM). It was easier to use the APS to set them all to the strongest signals, then reset the most obnoxious stations to weaker but better choices.

You can set the time and date automatically using the GPS, but you have to set the time zone (see the manual). Just keep hitting the button until you get the right one. You will need at least 3 satellites before the clock will reset (see GPS status). By the way, the fastest way to turn navigation on and off is the Nav button on the bottom (below the screen).

My main complaint is how long it takes to program in a destination. The touch screen (or at least mine) is not very responsive, and simply getting the right state takes forever. For roads which span more than one zip code, you need to know which zip code to use before you can find a given street number.

On a more amusing note, "SR" is pronounced "Senior" rather than "State Road" and for some reason "US" is pronounced "Saint."