

5 Useful Android Auto Features You Should Know

While most people know the basics of what you can do with Android Auto, there are still plenty of cool features you might not know about.

When Android Auto first launched in 2015, the experience was just okay. It was great to be able to access Android apps and control your phone right from your car's screen, but Android Auto was lacking a bunch of features and only worked on certain car models. There were also a lot of bugs to work out.

Ten years later, however, Android Auto has become much more comprehensive. Today, it's a great feature and has become essential to many people's driving experience. According to a McKinsey study, the lack of Android Auto or Apple Carplay is enough to change nearly half of new car buyers' minds.

While most people know the basics of what you can do with Android Auto, there are still plenty of cool features you might not know about. Here are five of my favorite Android Auto features to check out.

Navigate directly from Calendar events



Sometimes the best features aren't revolutionary. Instead, they simplify an often complex routine. That's exactly the case when generating navigation directions from Google Calendar events.

When Android Auto first launched, Google Calendar wasn't even supported, which made navigating to an address saved in an event a complicated, multi-step process: opening Calendar on your phone, finding the address, then manually entering it into Maps or Waze via Android Auto. Even when Google rolled out Calendar support in Android Auto, you'd still have to manually enter the address information (or use a voice command).

Today, however, you can simply open the Calendar app on Android Auto, tap on the event, and voila: You're navigating to the event's location through the selected app.

Of course, this requires storing the appropriate address information in that Calendar event. You can include location information when you create a Calendar event.

Use the buttons on the steering wheel to give voice commands

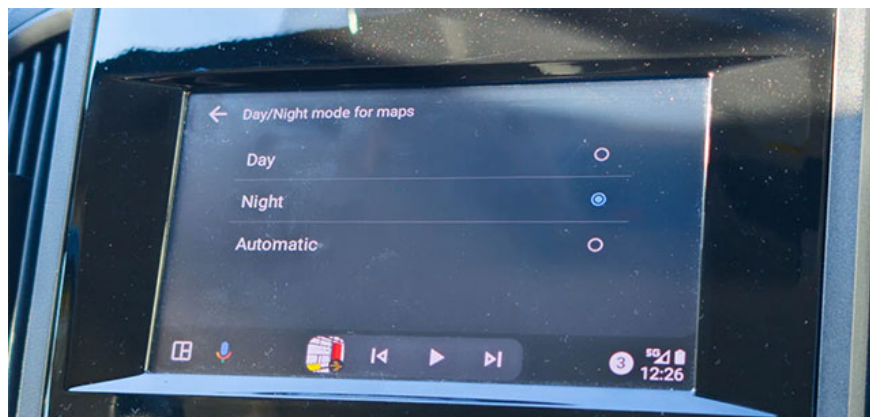


Some models, like the one in my Subaru Crosstrek, have a button on the steering wheel that allows you to give voice commands to the car's software. However, the voice commands you can give the car are quite limited and you need to be absolutely precise with the 'syntax'. This is not surprising since Subaru is a car company, not a software company.

Luckily, my phone takes over this button when Android Auto is active, making it an incredibly efficient way to launch Google Assistant voice commands, starting with the familiar "Hey Google."

Automakers should stop wasting time and resources trying to create their own virtual assistants and instead just create a button on the steering wheel that empowers Google or Apple.

Consistent dark mode for Maps



Android 10, released in 2019, introduced a system-wide dark mode. However, it took Android Auto a year to get the option. Likewise, Google Maps didn't get dark mode in Android Auto until months later. So Google Maps' dark mode hasn't been available in Android Auto for very long, so many people may not know about it.

Dark mode will make it easier for you to navigate on Google Maps, reducing glare that can cause unsafe driving, especially at night.

Customizable application shortcuts (like taskbar)



At Google I/O 2022, Google announced a 'Coolwalk' redesign of Android Auto. This design introduces the split-screen functionality that most people use to keep the navigation map on one side and the media player on the other, which is awesome. Along with that, Coolwalk also introduces app shortcuts, which we can call the taskbar.

These app shortcuts will show the four most recent apps you've accessed. Unless you cover them with a media player, the icons will always be there. This allows you to quickly jump to any of these apps without having to open the app drawer and look for them, which can be dangerous if you're driving.

For me, I really only use three apps: Google Maps, Google Calendar, and the phone app. Having these app shortcuts means I hardly ever need to open the app drawer, which is both quick to access and less distracting while driving.

Wide compatibility across multiple devices and media

As mentioned earlier, there was only one car model supported when Android Auto first launched: the 2015 Hyundai Sonata. You also needed a phone running Android 5.0 Lollipop, the latest version of Android at the time, which severely limited Android Auto's adoption.

Today, however, Android Auto works on almost every Android phone and in a wide variety of cars. Almost every new car is now compatible with Android Auto (along with Apple's equivalent for iPhones, called CarPlay).

Unfortunately, this widespread support may not last. Several automakers have abandoned both Android Auto and CarPlay, most notably Tesla. General Motors has also announced its intention to stop supporting both platforms in 2023. Automakers are looking to subscription models to generate more revenue.

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