

by Alan J. Pierce, EdD

Cobra SPX 7800BT Radar Detector

Do you often drive over the posted speed limit? When you notice a stopped police car do you nervously check your vehicle's speed to see if you were a target for a speeding ticket? If you answered yes to these questions you have probably wondered if you should purchase a radar detector.

All radar detectors attempt to determine if you are passing through an area where the speed of vehicles is being monitored by law enforcement. This police monitoring can be done the old fashioned way with a speed trap or less obviously using speed cameras attached to road signs and lampposts. The goal of owning a radar detector should be peace of mind when its audible signal reminds you to check your speed and stay out of the passing lane when you are passing through a threat zone.

To see what the Cobra SPX 7800BT (see photo 1) could do I tested it on a road trip from the New York metropolitan area to Baltimore Maryland. It had the chance to detect the different radar systems that law enforcement uses in New York City, New York State, New Jersey, and Maryland. The Cobra SPX 7800BT has no internal battery. For the unit to work, the power cable that comes with it needs to be plugged into an accessory outlet (cigarette lighter receptacle) of your vehicle. The power wire for the SPX 7800BT has an extra USB receptacle so you can also plug in your cellphone or other accessory that needs charging or constant power from your vehicle.

During testing the SPX 7800BT warned me of high threat zones. It detected X, K, Ka, VG-2, speed cameras, and even warned me that an emergency vehicle (ambulance) was approaching my area. The VG-2 signal indicated that law enforcement was scanning trucks for radar detectors, which is illegal for them to use. The unit also picked up signals from the safety alert traffic warning system which indicated that I was approaching road construction that required lane changing. During testing I never received a laser alert.



What I found makes the SPX 7800BT special is the Cobra free app for Android and Apple Smartphones. This app links to the SPX 7800BT by Bluetooth and uses your phone's GPS to monitor the police activity in your location. It provides you with information gathered from other iRadar users and also gives you the opportunity to report police activity and false alarms to the Cobra community by touching the display on your Smartphone.

Reasons to Drool

During testing the SPX 7800BT picked up all the different traffic enforcement wavelength bands except laser. Laser is very hard to detect and during the entire testing period I might never have been in a location where laser was being used. With a passenger giving full attention to the iRadar cellphone app the app was fun to use, and very informative as to the location of speed cameras and other community reported traps.

Not So Cool

The SPX 7800BT only comes with two mounting options. A small window suction cup mount and a small Velcro type pad for you to use to mount it on your car's dashboard. The bottom of SPX 7800BT is not flat because the view screen housing creates a 3/8th of an inch bump. See photo 1 again. To mount it on the dashboard of my vehicle I needed to create a riser block. See photo 2. I was also surprised that Cobra didn't include a visor mount and a universal mount for your cellphone. In most metropolitan areas like mine a detector left mounted in an extremely visible location when the car is parked becomes an excuse for someone to break into your car.

The SPX 7800BT is most effective if you use it with your cellphone. When driving alone reporting into the iRadar community requires you to divert your attention from the road to your cellphone; the equivalent of texting while driving. Also it is important for me to mention that using this app whenever you are driving could get very expensive if you don't have an unlimited data plan.

*Alan is co-author of **Introduction to Technology Glencoe McGraw-Hill 2010** and a **TechDirections Magazine** Columnist . Visit www.technologytoday.us for past columns, reviews, and resources.*