



Autoblog

K40 Calibre Remote Bluetooth Enabled Radar and Laser Protection System - Autoblog REVIEW

Posted Oct 6, 2005, 1:31 PM ET by John Neff

Related entries: Gadgets

When I heard that K40 had a new product in the pipeline, I made sure a press release was sent to Autoblog the day it was officially announced and was utterly shocked to learn that Bluetooth technology was somehow involved. Did government scientists working on a secret project invent a new type of Bluetooth that can detect radar from great distances as well as untether my keyboard and mouse from the computer? Not quite.

Read on for the first part of Autoblog's review of the K40 Calibre. K40's Calibre System takes all the fundamental components of the company's previous Undetectable System, a pair of front- and rear-mounted radar receivers and optional laser defusers, and uses Bluetooth technology to create a closed network through which each component can communicate with the Interior Network Module, otherwise known as the brains of the operation.

The significance of adding Bluetooth to the mix can best be appreciated when considering K40's target audience. These are well-to-do types who have a high-end auto or two in their garage and are more inclined to choose a custom-installed remote radar system with externally mounted receivers and internally mounted audio and visual warnings than a portable radar one that mounts on the windshield. In the past custom installing a remote system involved interfering with a car's electrical system and drilling holes in your firewall to run cables, most likely voiding your warranty in the process.

Hopefully the advantages of using a Bluetooth network are beginning to become obvious: no drilling holes, no voiding warranties. It's possible to install the entire system without a drill in such a way it can be removed later on, at the end of a lease perhaps, leaving behind no trace of itself.

K40's website nearly crashed from excess traffic the day Autoblog and Engadget simultaneously posted news on the Calibre System, so we have all of you to thank for receiving a unit to review. Normally K40 remote systems are purchased at the dealer or along with a new car or high-end audio shops and custom installed by professionals, but I was assured I'd be able to handle the installation myself despite my relative lack of experience.

Inside the nicely packaged boxes for both the Calibre system and accompanying Laser Defuser are all of the system's components as well as a set of installation instructions and wiring schematics. The major components include a front and rear radar receiver, the Interior Network Module attached to a small speaker, two small LEDs (dash-mounted pods are also available), the Laser Defuser with a universal mounting bracket and license plate mount, as well as all the various mounting hardware. While a number of self-tapping screws, nuts and bolts are included, K40 also supplies zip-ties in case you want your installation to be less permanent. This is a great idea as not only can the system be removed if you're

returning a leased vehicle, you may just not want to include your premium \$1,699.95 (price for Calibre DL including custom installation, not including Laser Defuser) remote radar protection system in the sale of your used luxury car.

I don't plan on posting a how-to on the installation since most end-users will never encounter the process, but I will touch on the high and low points. The lucky automobile on which the K40 Calibre is being installed is my trusty steed, a 1999 Oldsmobile Alero. It's not the ride K40 intended the Calibre to protect, but one of their test vehicles in the development process was an Alero so it's not the first time.

I began the installation with the Interior Network Module which involved popping the interior fuse panel and the plastic cover underneath my dash. I was extremely pleased that the installation didn't require the removal of the entire dash, as that would have been a level of invasiveness I didn't want to approach. The most difficult part of the installation early on was keeping the wiring straight, but the schematic is color coded and going slowly ensured I never "crossed streams", so to speak.

The system I received included the LEDs rather than the dash-mounted pods, which had me very concerned beforehand. The pair of LEDs need to be custom installed in the dash in an inconspicuous but visible place. I had a grand plan to remove and disassemble the gauge pod so I could drill two holes near the speedometer and tach to mount the LEDs. After backing myself into a corner with that plan I called K40 and told them my progress, which was met with a few chuckles. It turns out on an Alero the frame around the gauge pod can be popped off and two holes quickly drilled in either side, which places the LEDs right next to the steering column in plain view. Duh. So that ten-minute job took an hour and a half.

Next I moved to the front of the vehicle where both the front radar receiver and Laser Defuser would be installed. I found a great place for the radar receiver on the driver's side in one of the holes left for a fog lamp. Fortunately I was able to mount it on and behind some plastic, which should help keep the elements out. The units appear to be completely sealed, but why tempt fate? The radar receivers can actually operate through up to 1/4-inch thick plastic, so it's totally fine that they'll never see the light of day.

The installation of the Laser Defuser was a bit more difficult and reminded me why K40 likes these things to be installed by a pro. Unfortunately my license plate holder isn't removable, which meant I couldn't use K40's license plate mount with the defuser. That was a bummer as the installation would have taken ten minutes and been done correctly if that were the case. Instead I used the universal mounting bracket to secure it to a piece of bodywork running the width of the front end just below and behind the license plate. I thought I was cool for my clever mounting location, but the guys at K40 reminded me that where and at what angle the Laser Defuser is mounted is crucial. Being below and behind the license plate means that the effectiveness of the defuser will be reduced dramatically. Really the ideal place for it is the license plate mount, as that ensures the unit is level and a laser beam will hit the defuser at the same time or before it hits the plate. I plan on heavily modifying the license plate mount so I can move my defuser to that location soon, but for now it remains behind and below the plate.

The rear receiver I actually installed on a separate day, and while it might appear to be the most difficult install it was actually the easiest. I was an old-hat at custom remote radar detection system installs by this time, so the mounting and wiring of the rear receiver was no trouble. Though the service guys at K40 told me they had installed their rear unit on the frame using long zip ties, I decided I wanted my

receiver to be rear and center right behind the bumper plastic. I removed the rear bumper, which wasn't that hard, found a cozy little place where the receiver could be mounted, and popped the bumper back on.

Power for each of the system's components is siphoned off from other components in the car that are turned on with a turn of the ignition key. In the rear, for instance, I spliced into a wire providing power for the rear taillamps, only after using a voltmeter to make sure I had power when the car is on and no power when it's turned off.

Though the system comes with most of the hardware required, I did find myself using a few things that weren't included. Since splicing and connecting two wires together is required at times, I found a neat little plastic device (don't know its name) that eliminates the need for wiring stripping, wire twisting or electrical tape. You just insert the wire you're tapping into the side of this piece, the wire that needs power into a little hole and use a pair of pliers to squeeze it all together. A metal piece punctures the tapped wire and makes contact with the other, securing them both and creating a solid connection. I also had to get power straight from the fuse box for the front radar receiver and Interior Network Module, which I achieved by jamming the bare wire into the socket with the fuse. I've already purchased an Add-A-Circuit that will make this connection cleaner and more secure, but it would have been nice if it were included.

With the installation complete I turned the key of my car and was greeted by a flash of the LEDs, a little chirp and husky voice that said, "K40 On". The remote for the Calibre system is perhaps my favorite part, which is a good thing since it's the only component the end-user actually deals with on a daily basis. It can be used to change the system to Highway Mode (most sensitive), City Mode (selectively sensitive) and to turn it off. You can also mute the system or change the volume between a high and low setting, as well as turn the voice off.

I've only had the K40 Calibre installed completely for a few days now and my initial impressions are very positive. Perhaps I have a great appreciation for its conspicuousness since I actually installed it, but I love knowing there are expensive pieces of radar detection and laser defusing equipment installed on my car that are constantly communicating with each other through a closed Bluetooth network, and all that I see are two little blue LEDs. It's an extremely non-demanding end user experience, which I image is what the rich and famous among us go for.

I'll be swinging by my favorite speed traps and driving by the local area malls to test the performance of the K40 Calibre in the field, as well as how it fares against false alerts.

If you have any specific questions about the system, ask them in the comments section and we'll get an answer for you.

Until then my right foot's going to be planted against the floor.