

Review of "Saab Infotainment Plus (Prestige 300)"

This is a short review of the navigation system that is included in the Saab Infotainment Plus (Prestige 300) system. My comments are based upon using similar systems from Pioneer during the last three years. I've used both a CD-ROM based system, Pioneer AVIC-505, and a DVD based system, Pioneer AVIC-60D.

Display

Prestige 300 uses a built-in 5.8-inch color display, whereas AVIC-60D had an external 6.5-inch wide display and AVIC-505 had an external 5.6-inch wide display. Being used to the 6.5-inch display, 5.8-inch feels a bit small, but apart from that it's an excellent display. There are no problems at all reading the information. It is also nicely integrated into the dashboard. One benefit with this, as compared to a external display, is that you don't have to remove it every time you park the car outside (to avoid it being stolen).



Display and controls

Navigation

There are three basic ways to find a target; you can enter the address (country, city, street and street number), search for a point of interest or point on the map. Address search is very straight forward, just select country (current country pre-selected), enter name of the city (enter letters with the control wheel or select from a list) and then enter the name of the street (or select a junction. Optionally a street number can be entered, although that option may be grayed out depending on what road is selected.



Select destination

You can also choose to search for a point of interest. Such as a restaurant, a petrol station or a museum. Optionally you can select a city, or just search all over the country. Searching for petrol stations can be filtered to a particular company, such as Shell.

Finally, you can also choose to point directly on the map and the system will pick the road closest to that point.

During navigation, you can choose between three different displays; map only, map and arrow or arrow only. Additionally, you will get an arrow in the upper SID with information on the next move together with information on the distance to the next move. This means that you don't have to look at the map all the time, but instead can keep your eyes on the road.

Also, driving directions are presented by a voice. This will typically start to alert you when there are a couple of kilometers remaining until the next move (on motorways, shorter distances in cities). You will get messages such as "Turn left in 3 kilometers" or "In the roundabout take the second exit". The radio is m messages.

You can store a number of places in the address book, and also add 12 of them to a favorites list. This is great compared to the Pioneer systems, which only had two favorites (otherwise you had to select from the address book). You get access to the favorites list when you enter the navigation system, simply press the corresponding button to start routing to that point.



Select country, city, street, street number or junction



Enter letters or select from a list



Map only



Map and arrow



Arrow only

Additional settings

You can do a number of settings that influence the routing. Such as selecting if you want to avoid motorways, ferries or pay roads. You can also select if you want TMC (Traffic Message Channel) to have influence on the route. This is great; avoid being stuck in traffic because of accidents or roadwork. Because of this, I use navigation on my way to work even if I know the way.



Select map scale and icons. On a similar display, settings for routing can be set.

Accuracy

Overall, it's working very well. Now and then there could be an error on the map, such as a petrol station being at the wrong location. At least the Pioneer systems are also equipped with gyro, so when the satellite connection is interrupted (when driving in tunnels and such) the unit still manages to keep you on the road. The system can get a bit confused if you do a lot of turning during these circumstances. Did some driving along River Mosel in Germany with the AVIC-505, and along the winding roads it sometimes got lost. But as soon as the satellites are "visible" again, the system gets you back on the map. Haven't had chances to test Prestige 300 under these circumstances yet.

Rerouting is one of the more important features of the system. If you drive past a junction, or simply decides to take a different road compared to what the system suggests. The older systems, in my case the AVIC-505, take a while to calculate a new route. And if you continue to drive, you might miss the next calculated route as well. Depending on the complexity of the route, it can take anything between 30 seconds and 1 minute to calculate the new route. So the best thing then is to simply stop along the road until it's done with recalculating. This is not a problem with AVIC-60 or Prestige 300; recalculations are very quick, like 5-10 seconds or so (depending on the route).

The Pioneer systems have a tendency to prioritize motorways in a ridiculous way sometimes (depending on your settings). That is that they want you to drive as much as possible on the motorway, even if there's a shorter way on smaller roads. The Prestige 300 does the opposite, if sometimes takes you on smaller roads just because they are part of a shorter distance, even if they takes longer time to drive. But they will take you to the target anyway.

Maps seem to be very up to date with information on one-way streets and such. But remember that there are new maps being produced, so now and then it might be worth upgrading the map. I've been doing quite some driving in both Stockholm and Gothenburg, and it works fine according to me. But I guess that sometimes you would have chosen another route if you knew the city. Anyway, it doesn't matter to me as long as I get to the target in a fairly straight line. Compared to reading maps, keeping track of where you are and where you are going, these systems work very well.

CD-ROM vs. DVD

So what's the difference between using a CD-ROM based solution and a DVD based solution? Well, this pretty much depends on how and where you travel. If you stay in the same country, or part of the country in some cases, it's not that big difference.

One difference is that most of the DVD based systems are newer, sort of second generation. This means that they have improved hard- and software, making them faster during calculations and also having additional features – such as TMC.



If you travel a lot between countries, the DVD has a huge advantage since whole Western Europe is included on the same disc. As a comparison, if you use CD-ROM instead you will have one disc for Sweden and Denmark, two discs for Germany, one disc for the Alps... And even if major roads are covered on most discs, when you need details you still will have to change to the local disc. Since most navigation units are installed in the luggage space, it could mean that you have to unload your luggage every time you want to change disc (I've done that a number of times...).

Prestige 300 uses maps from Navtech, as does Pioneer. Most map sites on the Internet are using the same material as well, such as OnStar and Yahoo Maps.

Price

With a price of SEK 29.400, it's a very competitive solution. At least together with a CD changer at SEK 4.400 or a single CD player at SEK 2.400. As a comparison, the Pioneer AVIC-60D itself cost SEK 29.500 a year ago with discount at Saab (without any radio, CD or such).

Also remember that installation of an after market kit will cost you some money, unless you do the installation yourself. But beware that this will require you to remove quite a lot of the interior, and that it will take you one day or so (antenna shall be on the dashboard, display on a bracket somewhere, navigation unit somewhere in the luggage area, speed pulse from speedometer shall be connected, power cord to the navigation unit, wire from navigation unit to the display and from the antenna...).

When it's time to upgrade the maps, a CD-ROM will cost something like SEK 1.100 and a DVD something like SEK 3.500.

Links

TMC – information about Traffic Message Channel

<http://www.tmcforum.com/>

Navtech – information about maps

<http://www.navtech.com/>