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Club Dread

Tested: USD remote volume control, Air Taser security club BY MICHAEL MICHNAY & MICAH SHEVELOFF

USD

RmVol-2 Remote Volume Control

FOR YEARS, HARDCORE CAR-STEREO BUFFS HAVE BENEFITED from the wonders of aftermarket and custom remote volume controls. These rather simple devices allow users the flexibility of being able to control a system's gain structure from a remote position in the car. Being able to boost or lower your system's bass level or rear fill this way is *very* convenient, let me tell you. In the past, remote volume controllers have only been feasible for those individuals with enough expertise to build them or enough greenbacks to buy custom-fabricated devices. Until now, that is.

Enter USD's RmVol-2 (\$295), a unit designed to remotely control the volume level of a sound system. Using a double-throw momentary switch, the user can raise and lower the volume of the preamp/line-level signal just before it hits the amplifier. In essence, you can control the output of an entire sound system independent of the output of the head unit or amp.

To be honest, the RmVol-2 isn't much of a looker. The controller's guts are housed in a standard, industrial-looking blue plastic box, which measures 1.6 x 4.75 x 2.6 inches (h/w/d). The housing sports a wiring diagram affixed to its top, a multi-colored five-wire pigtail (one red, two black, one purple, one pink) protruding from its left side, and four gold female RCA connectors (left and right input/outputs) sticking out of its right side. Unfortunately, nothing else was included with the unit—not even an installation manual.

For this evaluation, I installed the RmVol-2 in a 1997 Chevy Tahoe. Integrating the volume controller into the Tahoe's sound system was a breeze. To feed the RmVol-2 juice, I tapped off a power cable leading to one of the Tahoe's amplifiers. In the wiring diagram, USD suggests placing a 1-ampere fuse between the 12-volt hot lead and the unit's

red wire (smart move), but fails to supply a fuse and fuse holder with the unit to do so (not so smart). Sadly, this oversight isn't an uncommon practice among manufacturers. Suggestion: While both items can easily be obtained at hardware stores for a combined cost of \$5-\$8, including a generic fuse and fuse holder along with the main product is a practice worth considering.

Next, I secured the two black ground wires and ran the pink and purple wire leads to a two-position momentary switch. Wiring up the momentary switch proved to be the only frustrating part of the install, as the pink and purple leads were mis-marked on my RmVol-2's wiring diagram. Usually, the pink wire controls volume up and the purple controls volume down. In this case, however, the opposite was true—purple was up and pink was down. Although this manufacturing error proved to be an annoyance, it was easily remedied by simply reversing the wire leads on the switch.

To complete the install, I decided to start my evaluation by using the RmVol-2 as a bass-level control. I routed the Tahoe's low-pass crossover output through the RmVol-2 and then into the amplifier inputs that feed the system's subwoofer. Total install time: a scant 20 minutes.

I then fired up the RmVol-2. With the sub amp's gain turned almost all the way up, the RmVol-2 performed admirably as a bass-volume control. It let me adjust the amount of bass independent of the rest of the system, and, when I adjusted the system's main volume knob, the bass level responded proportionately. I was very impressed here. Looking to test the device's versatility, I rewired the RmVol-2 to act as a rear-fill volume control, and, once again, it performed admirably.

Conclusion: I dig the RmVol-2. It's a very useful tool. However, USD needs to decide whether this product is geared toward the installer or the avid DIYer. If the latter is the case, USD has to explain their product a little better by putting together a comprehensive owner's manual and installation guide, complete with a list of every possible install scenario. If it's intended for the experienced installer, then its sticker price has to come way down.

—Michael Michnay

USD, Dept. CSR, 1030 N. Main St., Orange, CA 92667; 714-997-2475. Web site: www.usdaudio.com. Circle 152 on reader-service card

Air Taser Auto Taser Security Club

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE TO HAVE AN AUTOMOTIVE SECURITY product that proactively fights against car theft? Most of today's high-tech auto-security devices are reactive: a car thief trips a sensor, then an alarm sounds. Even though these types of security systems are proven to effectively deter auto theft, they're relatively benign; that is, they don't directly make the perpetra-



Volume dealer:
USD's RmVol-2

parts & security

tor pay for his or her indiscretion. Me, I want a system that literally takes a bite out of crime. Air Taser's Auto Taser security club is designed to do just that—in a “shockingly” intriguing manner.

Similar to The Club, the Auto Taser (\$250) clamps onto a steering wheel, making it difficult for a perp to operate the vehicle in question without first removing it. It can also be positioned to protect your head unit. The Auto Taser takes steering-wheel security one step further by purporting to be a surrogate “electrified fence.” Once secured, it becomes a remote-controlled alarm system that incorporates a 130-dB siren and a vibration sensor, both of which are tucked neatly within the device's compact shell. When the vibration sensor is tripped, the Auto Taser activates a field of electrons that completely surrounds it. If someone attempts to touch the device after the electron field has been activated, they'll be summarily zapped with a 5,900-milliwatt electron pulse. The manufacturer says that while this charge isn't lethal, it's “unforgettable.”

The Auto Taser measures 2 x 24 x 2 inches (h/w/d) and weighs 4 pounds. Essentially, it's a midnight-black hollow steel bar covered with brass-colored electrical traces. A flashing red light, located in the center of the bar, indicates arm/disarm status, low battery, and remote-control-programming confirmation. Attached to the left end of the bar is the steering-wheel clamp and locking mechanism. Under the locking mechanism, hidden safely within the steel bar, is a battery tray and electron-field circuitry.

The battery tray in the unit we tested was makeshift at best. To gain access to it, you simply pull a cheap plastic tab and the whole kit and caboodle slides out of the end of the steel tube like a dresser drawer. The tray consisted of a wafer-thin circuit board with three skimpy 9-

volt battery connectors attached to it. Two pieces of foam attached to the edges of the circuit board keep everything from sliding around when the so-called “tray” is returned to its standard operating position within the bar. A bit distressed about all this, I called Air Taser to make sure I wasn't working with an unfinished prototype. They said that I wasn't, but mentioned that they'd made further “enhancements” to the device “after feedback from our customers and dealers/distributors.” In the updated version, the battery tray is now a molded plastic sub-assembly. Unlike the tray on the unit I had, which was flimsy and permanently attached to the device, the new battery tray is said to be very sturdy and can be completely removed for added convenience. (All product updates, according to Air Taser, were only cosmetic in nature, not performance-oriented.)

Also incorporated into the locking mechanism is a metal tab dubbed the Safety Interlocking Switch (SIS), which lets the Auto Taser know that it's been attached to a steering wheel. For obvious safety reasons, the Auto Taser won't activate unless it's securely fastened to a steering wheel. Even though this failsafe feature performed flawlessly during my evaluation, the metal tab is very weak, and it looks like a 2-year-old could easily twist it off. Again, Air Taser said they'd made modifications, as the SIS is said to now be manufactured from the same tough plastic used to make the updated battery tray, and is no longer standalone. The sturdier SIS switch has been incorporated into the plastic battery tray and is less likely to break off.

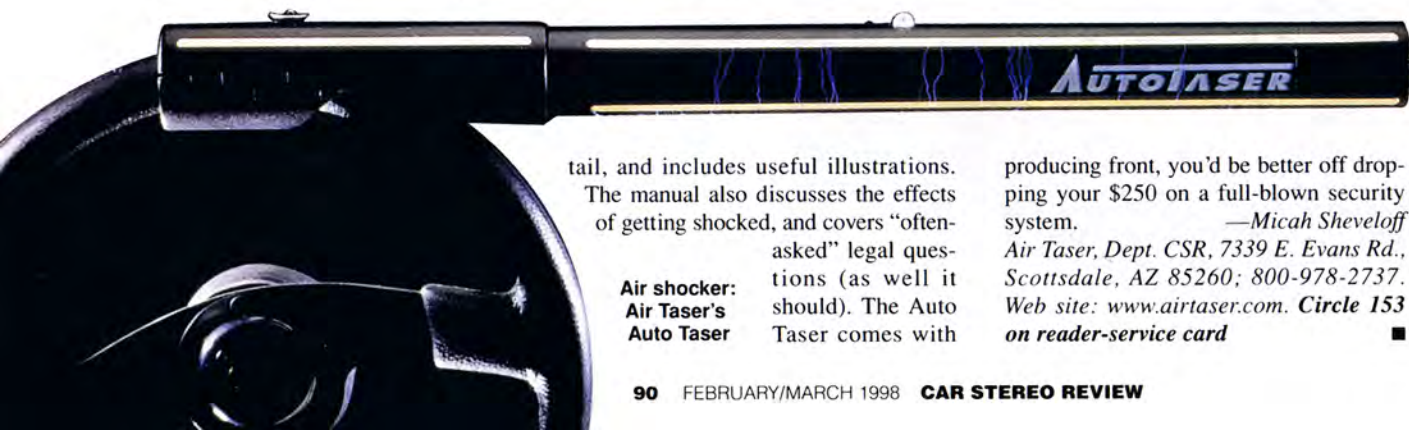
Only one remote control is supplied. It activates and deactivates the device's Alarm mode and Test function. And as far as owner's manuals go, the Auto Taser's gets an A+ in my book. It was very well written, covers every feature in minute de-

90-day warranty; a 3-year extended warranty is available for \$40.

Dying to see this baby in action, I armed it with three 9-volt Energizers (as recommended in the owner's manual) and attached it to the steering wheel of a 1995 Jeep Wrangler. Not willing to incur any bodily harm myself, I tripped the alarm's Test function via the remote. The 130-dB siren sounded immediately, and, within a few seconds, the entire surface of the Auto Taser was enveloped by visible electrical arcs. In Test mode, the electron field lasts for only 30 seconds. In Alarm mode, the electron field can only be disarmed via the remote control. This impressive display of electricity is intended to act as a deterrent. After seeing the Auto Taser angrily gnash its teeth, there was no way that I'd go near the thing. But who would?

Luckily, Ralph Meyers, an 18-year-old customer of mine, was willing to experience the wrath of the Auto Taser firsthand. As we didn't quite know what to expect, we had Ralph sign a waiver, and we decidedly do *not* recommend that you “try this at home.” The instant Ralph grabbed the device as he would a tennis racket with one hand, the 130-dB siren sounded off, and, within a few seconds, his hand was completely engulfed by electric sparks. At that point, a startled Ralph quickly jerked his hand away from the bar. “That hurt,” he chuckled nervously, but he didn't seem to be worse for wear. To be honest, I was expecting a more intense reaction on Ralph's part.

In the end, the Auto Taser wasn't exactly the paralyzingly proactive weapon I'd anticipated. While it's certainly a product of creative design and theory, I'm not sure to what degree it'll stave off a hardened criminal. Car thieves are a desperate lot, and smart enough to find ways around most security devices. Until the Auto Taser ups the ante on the pain-



tail, and includes useful illustrations. The manual also discusses the effects of getting shocked, and covers “often-

Air shocker:
Air Taser's
Auto Taser

asked” legal questions (as well it should). The Auto Taser comes with

producing front, you'd be better off dropping your \$250 on a full-blown security system.

—Micah Sheveloff

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