

Edward C. Baig: Review: A few bumps, but Waze and Apple CarPlay steer you in the right direction

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I've been a fan of Waze for several years now, but my devotion to the free "crowdsourced" GPS navigation app went only so far. Since Waze

was confined to my iPhone—meaning I couldn't peek at a Waze map on my dashboard or in the infotainment display—I typically used it only when my wife was in the passenger seat.

Kind of defeated the purpose, but, hey, safety first.

I was thrilled, therefore, when Apple, through the recent iOS 12 update, finally let Waze come to the dash of my Honda Accord, and to the more than 400 other vehicle models compatible with CarPlay. (That's Apple's infotainment system for your set of wheels, and it delivers an icon-driven interface that resembles the look of your iPhone.)

Waze was previously made available on Google's rival Android Auto system.

Before the arrival of iOS 12, you could use CarPlay only with Apple's own Maps app, whose directions, I found all too often, left something to be desired.

Now that Apple lets CarPlay accept third-party navigation apps, you can also integrate Google Maps or other turn-by-turn solutions. Speaking of which, Google acquired Waze in 2013, though it continues to be run autonomously.

I've favored Waze for its various strengths: notably how it leverages the data collected from other drivers to help you (at least some of the time) avoid traffic bottlenecks or warn you of potholes, floods, stopped cars, speed traps and red-light cameras along your route.

What's more, since there's a community aspect to the the app, you in turn can assist fellow Waze drivers, by tapping buttons on the touchscreen to report any obstacles or hazards you come across on the road.

There's no special set-up to using Waze with CarPlay, so long as you have the most recent version of the app on your iPhone and have already updated to iOS 12. I connected the phone to a USB port in my Honda and tapped the Waze icon that appeared on one of the CarPlay screens.

However welcome, Waze in CarPlay isn't perfect.

The biggest drawback is the lack of full integration with Siri, which Apple reserves for its own Maps app. In my Honda, I can summon Siri with a "Hey, Siri" command or by pressing a dedicated button on the steering wheel. But you can't ask Siri to funnel directions through Waze or any other app of your choice. Siri only makes nice with Apple Maps.

That means you might have to choose your destination directly through the app on the phone.

Waze does have its own voice recognition, so by tapping a microphone icon I was able to ask the app to navigate to my home or work, the addresses of which I had already stored in the app. You can add other favorite destinations as well.

What you're not going to want to do, of course, is tap the mic button to take you some place while you're cruising along the highway, a potentially dangerous distraction.

When the Waze voice does pipe in through the car stereo with your next turn-by-turn instruction, the sound from the music that may be playing is lowered, or, in the case of the Apple Podcast I frequently listen to, silenced altogether. The audio resumes once you've gotten that direction.

Some other Waze smartphone features are missing in CarPlay. For example, while Waze display the local speed limit on the road you are on, you won't get an alert as on the phone if you exceed that limit;

CarPlay uses its own speedometer.

I'm told Waze is investigating additional visual signal options, but the company hasn't revealed what those might look like.

The user interface of CarPlay is pretty much determined by Apple, with the corresponding functionality chosen by Waze. For now, there is no satellite maps view in Waze.

I did find it useful when a Waze voice kicked in to tell me about construction or hidden police, accompanied by an onscreen notification that you can tap to say either "Thanks!" or "Not There." If I didn't tap either of those options, I had to wait for such pop-up notifications to time out and disappear, which sometimes seemed to take longer than I'd have liked.

I also have to report that, on at least one occasion, the Waze app crashed: The screen went black while I continued to get audible turn-by-turn navigation.

I've had quibbles from time to time with almost every GPS system I've ever used—Waze is no exception—in terms of what struck me at the time as the wrong way to get somewhere. I was recently driving to the Jersey Meadowlands during rush hour for a football game, and I was tempted to ignore what I was convinced was an odd circular route. But I followed Waze's instructions and made it by kickoff—no telling if I'd have done so going some other way.

For sure, the presence of Waze steers CarPlay in the right direction. But there are still a few bumps along the road.

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