

I've dumped Charles Adler for something named Otto

I know this sounds sacrilegious to some, but I've found a way to turn off CJOB.

I listen to the soothing tones of Otto instead. Otto is a little black box that sits on top of car's dashboard, right above my now-silent radio.

It's the size of a wallet and it tells me when I'm coming close to one of the city's 48 intersection camera locations or one of the many crosswalks scattered throughout Winnipeg.

Otto also tells me, in a calming woman's voice and a muted light prompt, if I'm driving too fast. For it knows all the speed limits in Winnipeg and tells you when you're going above the posted limit.

It works through Global Positioning System technology and is so easy to use it's silly.

If you know the difference between "on" and "off," you can use it, too.

I started using Otto a month ago after I did a story about it and its developers, Winnipeggers Frank Franczyk, Jay Vanstone, John Graumann and Tom Cwikla.

Their company, Persentech, started marketing Otto to Winnipeggers July 20. Winnipeg is the first city where motorists can try out this one-of-a-kind technology.

Since that date, Otto has sat on my car's dash, plugged into my car's cigarette lighter, almost every time I get in to go somewhere.

Consequently, the car radio stays off. Charles Adler and Richard Cloutier no longer occupy my head space, vying for my undivided attention.

I listen to Otto instead. I wait for it to tell me if I'm speeding or cruising past an intersection camera.

Franczyk tells me Otto will soon be unveiled in Ottawa and that two city companies have signed on to sell Otto — Royal Tire and Computer Boulevard.

In Winnipeg, the roughly 200 Otto users can now download (www.myottomate.com) all the school zones in the city.

These zones, with help from human hands, will be added to Otto's tiny inside circuit board and its memorized map of Winnipeg.

The benefit of that is that Otto will now tell them if they're driving too fast by a school, and perhaps avoid a ticket issued by one of the police mobile photo radar units.

It's possible all the city's railway crossings will be available at some point soon, something that would help all school bus drivers.

Otto was created as a way to get people to drive more slowly and is being marketed as a safety product. It's also intended to make motorists more aware of their surroundings while not being distracted.

With it plugged in beside me, I find I pay more attention to my driving so that I don't trigger Otto's voice or warning lights.

Which means I'm driving more slowly, which, I guess, is another way of saying Otto works.

So, sorry Charles and Richard. My radio will stay silent. Otto's on instead.



Bruce Owen