

# Review: What can your car tell you? Automatic streams driving data to your phone

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In late 2013, I reviewed a gadget called the Automatic smart driving monitor, which is a small dongle you attach to the diagnostic port under your car's dashboard.

The dongle talks via Bluetooth to your smartphone to transmit data about your driving habits, trips and data from your [car](#)'s computer, including miles per gallon and engine diagnostics.

At the time, I loved the idea but thought its features were too limited to warrant paying \$100 for it.

The device did keep track of your trips, but you were only able to view the data after the trip was over.

I wanted more from the device and from the software, and while it took a year and a half, my wish has been granted.

The second-generation Automatic dongle (still \$99.95, [automatic.com](#)) has more features, including real-time driving feedback and an app store with more than 20 apps (and more coming) that take advantage of the device's data feed.

The original Automatic only worked with the Automatic app. It had to be paired with your phone to record data. So what's new?

The dongle has new functionality. While it looks like the old Automatic dongle, version two has Bluetooth streaming and GPS, which is enabling all sorts of cool new apps.

Yes, you read right ... data from your car can be displayed in real time to let you analyze all sorts of metrics on speed, rpm, horsepower, torque, miles per gallon, cost of each mile and much more.

When you're finished driving, all that data can be exported for examination.

GPS data is stored and reported, even if your smartphone is not connected.

The dongle installation takes all of 10 seconds or so. You plug it into the OBD-II port under your dash (mine is right above my right knee when I'm driving) and pair it to your smartphone.

Once you have the phone paired, you can begin to use the free Automatic app or download one of the third-party apps, most of which are not free.

The included Automatic app still isn't designed to be used while you are driving, but it is much improved and worth your time to learn and use.

Each trip you take is logged with details that include a route map, with distance and time, [miles per gallon](#) on the trip and the cost of your gas.

The dongle also keeps track of your driving habits, marking each time you accelerate too quickly or hit your brakes too hard. You can also set a speed threshold so that it will warn you when you exceed the limit.

You can tag specific trips as business-related, so you can export the data

for tax purposes or other uses.

Like before, the app remembers where you parked so you can get back to your car when you forget exactly where you left it.

Automatic now uploads your data to the cloud so you can see a dashboard view on your computer's browser. The dashboard lets you view your trips and accompanying data with greater detail.

I took a drive around town, and it was interesting to see my route re-created on the map with information about each stop. You can combine small trips by telling the software to ignore stops that are less than 15 minutes.

You can input data on your specific vehicle, and Automatic will let you know when you're running low on gas (if your car supports reporting fuel levels through the diagnostic port).

Automatic also has an Apple Watch app that is a bit limited at the moment. It will help you remember where you parked and let you tag trips as business-related.

## THIRD-PARTY APPS

Where the Automatic gets really interesting is when you connect a third-party app that can take advantage of that live data stream as you drive.

The Automatic app page is divided into several sections.

There are apps for business that will let you keep track of fleet activity, track expenses and even work out how to split the cost of ride sharing.

There are apps for convenience that can help you set up automations

using IFTTT and even let you connect to a Nest thermostat.

Why would you want your car to talk to your thermostat?

How about if the thermostat knew when you left the office and set itself to turn on the AC or heat? You can set up simple or complex rules for time, day and location to control the thermostat settings.

There are apps to help with performance.

I bought DashCommand (\$9.99, available for iOS and Android), and I'm impressed with the presentation.

It shows and logs information including speed, rpm, coolant temperature, fuel pressure and a ton more in both digital and analog form.

I especially like the real-time fuel mileage information. It's easy to see how changing your driving habits in small ways makes a big difference in your mileage.

## CONCLUSION

Everyone can drive smarter and save gas if they have the right data and feedback. The Automatic is the perfect tool to show you exactly what's happening under your hood and in your fuel tank.

The fact that you can see your data during trips is just the feature the Automatic needed to make it a must-have gadget for your car.

If you're a car guy or just a techie like me, the Automatic has something for you.

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Pros: Maps trips, logs costs, streams real-time [data](#) from your car.

Cons: None.

Bottom line: If you love cars or drive for a living, the Automatic is invaluable.

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