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How to Create the Ultimate Road Trip Playlist

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by Kenny Gallo



Hitting the road without a musical plan is foolhardy. How can you enjoy all that time in your ride if you are constantly flipping between radio stations or your MP3 player? The right (or wrong) jams can ruin your journey and make everyone in your car cringe in anticipation of your bad selections. In order to own the road and keep everyone happy on the way to the beach, Atlantic City, or grandma's house, you need to cast the widest net with your selections and give your passengers what they want to hear. Creating the **Ultimate Road Trip Playlist** is paramount to your journey. Here are some tips to win the battle and let you concentrate on your GPS.

Songs With the Word "Highway" or "Road" in the Title are Usually Good Choices

Maybe you hate AC/DC, but the moment "Highway to Hell" comes on, the Road Trip has begun. No, you're not going to Hell, but you are, probably, getting on the highway. Right? Similarly, if "Life is a Highway" by Tom Cochrane, "I Am The Highway" by Audioslave, "Red Dirt Road" by Brooks and Dunn or "Down the Road I Go" by Travis Tritt (for the country lovers), can't get you amped, you should probably stay home and watch TV.

When in Doubt, Channel The Classic Rock Canon

You can't escape "**Carry On My Wayward Son**" by Kansas, nor should you. Everyone knows it and when you are hitting the road with your friends, if you kept your iPod in shuffle mode and an obscure Elvis Costello song comes on from an album that no one has heard of, you lose. Stay with the familiar. And, bands in this genre that can place multiple songs in this **Ultimate Road Trip Playlist**? (Steppenwolf, Deep Purple, Allman Brothers, Eagles) They are gold.

Caution: Use Kitsch Sparingly

No one can deny the comic appeal of a disco-era song when driving. Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" might lighten the mood in traffic OR "Kung Fu Fighting" may induce some light hearted chuckles in the back seat. Don't overdo it. You might lose some respect by the time you reach your destination.

Where To?

Depending on where the open road leads, you may need some site specific song selections. Going to the beach? "In The Summertime" by Mungo Jerry, "Hot Fun in the Summertime" by Sly and the Family Stone, or "Summer of '69" by Bryan Adams, will not let you down.

Use an Entire Album if Appropriate

The days of the album may be over, but that doesn't mean that a slice of a band's greatest moment works here especially if you will be on the road for more than five hours. Is the work in question cruise friendly? Does it tell a story in chapters? Is it by a jam band with an occasional song that lasts eight minutes? Suggestions:

- **Meatloaf**, *Paradise by the Dashboard Light*
- **Prince**, *Purple Rain*
- **Guns and Roses**, *Appetite for Destruction*
- **Dr. Dre**, *The Chronic*
- **Grateful Dead** (any live recording)

Take the Temperature of Your Buddies

Know your audience. Your pre-teen daughters may not be fans of Motley Crue, but that doesn't mean you can't mix it up. Eclectic is the best way to go here. Save that love for Industrial music for your gym.

Essentials

After mulling over our advice, it's time to get down to it. No matter what else you decide to listen to (be it Spotify, Pandora, or a passionate mixtape from a relative), these road tunes are essential companions to any sojourn down the highway.

- **"Life in the Fast Lane" (or "Take it Easy")**, Eagles
Only Jeff Lebowsky hates the Eagles.
- **"Magic Carpet Ride" (or "Born to Be Wild")**, Steppenwolf
These might be the only two songs by this band that anyone has ever heard. But, they are staples.
- **"Highway Star"**, Deep Purple
If you can find the live version with the extended jam, even better.
- **"Midnight Rider,"** The Allman Brothers
Greg Allman is the face of any long road trip.
- **"Bohemian Rhapsody,"** Queen
Those in the backseat will be singing along as they did in *Wayne's World*.
- **"The Distance,"** Cake
Chorus: "He's going the distance. He's going for speed. He's going the distance." Works for me.
- **"I've Been Everywhere,"** Johnny Cash
You might want to go everywhere. Over and over again.
- **"Here I Go Again,"** Whitesnake
See above.
- **"Call Me the Breeze,"** Lynyrd Skynyrd
Southern rock that "keeps blowin' down the road."
- **"On The Road Again,"** Willie Nelson
Possibly, the most appropriate song in ANY playlist.
- **"East Bound and Down,"** Jerry Reed (from *Smokey and the Bandit*)
When paired with another similar CB radio song, you've exhausted your 70s kitsch factor.
- **"Rockin' Down that Highway,"** The Doobie Brothers
A song that screams to be played in a Mustang convertible.
- **"Truckin',"** Grateful Dead
As with any Dead song, an infectious jam that's easy on the ears.
- **"I Am a Ramblin' Man,"** Waylon Jennings
City to city, that's the story of any rambling man on a Road Trip.
- **"Good Riddance (The Time of Your Life),"** Green Day
The soundtrack to many who grew up in the 90s is also a perfect ending to the last 10 minutes of your journey.

You can't go wrong with any of the above. But given the subjective nature of music in general, everything is negotiable. When the time comes, you'll know when to shuffle on. So... what's in your **Ultimate Road Trip Playlist**?

Kenny Gallo is a writer living in Richmond, VA.

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