

Reviews

Belkin TuneBase FM for iPhone and iPod



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The history of Belkin's TuneBase FM line dates back to late 2004, when the iPod mini-only [TuneBase FM](#) was released. Subsequently, there have been a number of other editions of the product, including versions for [full-sized iPods](#) and [iPod nanos](#), as well as last year's [revised iPod-agnostic version](#) with a new automatic station-finding feature called ClearScan. Each product has offered the same general features -- a car charging bulb with a protruding gooseneck mount, an iPod-holding cradle, and an integrated user-tunable FM transmitter -- but the cosmetics and specifics have changed a little from year to year.

A- highly recommended
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Company: Belkin

Website: [www.Belkin.com](#)

Model: TuneBase FM

Price: \$100

Compatible: iPod 4G, 5G, classic, nano, touch, iPhone



This year's version, TuneBase FM for iPhone and iPod (\$100), is superficially near-identical to last year's TuneBase FM with ClearScan. Preserved are the silver, black, and dark gray color scheme, the general shape of the iPod cradle, its high-contrast tuning screen, its ClearScan technology, and its bottom-mounted audio-out port, as well as its three "Pro" audio settings that tweak its sound output for different volume levels. Careful inspection or direct side-by-side comparison reveals that the new version's cradle is larger than its predecessor's, both in height and width, now only slightly narrower than the iPhone or a full-sized iPod. And its replaceable clear iPod holders, once limited to four, have been increased to eight for all current iPod and iPhone models, as well as past versions. Six rubber pads are included for these devices, and an optional plastic ring spacer is included if you need it for added car charging stability.



Though we won't rehash the full review of last year's product, which you can [reference for additional details](#), it suffices to say that the new TuneBase FM is not only truly iPhone-compatible, but also a much better FM transmission performer than the company's earlier [TuneCast Auto for iPhone and iPod](#). Regardless of the fact that we tested the nearly fixed-distance TuneBase FM at greater distances from our car stereos than TuneCast Auto, which could be moved quite close to the stereos, TuneBase FM put out a clearer, better signal that we found to be considerably more listenable than TuneCast's. Though not completely devoid of static, the audio signal so dominated the slight noise under most circumstances that we found that static—a nearly ever-present issue in FM transmitters—inoffensive. Playing with the Pro settings had small but noticeable effects on the sound, with the monaural Pro Talk setting bringing static down the lowest.



It's also worth noting that ClearScan, which didn't work especially well in our testing of the iPhone version of TuneCast Auto, worked properly in the new TuneBase FM. It did a good job of automatically finding empty stations, and more importantly, TuneBase FM filled those stations with low-static audio that sounded great to our ears, if not as bass-rich as in some of the iPod-only transmitters we've tested in the past. The only reason we wouldn't call ClearScan's performance "great" is that we found that it had a tendency to repeatedly return the same good results, rather than hunting further; that said, it's hard to deeply criticize a feature that does what it's supposed to be doing without returning more mediocre fifth or sixth results.



Our only real issues with the new TuneBase FM are small ones. Though the 3.25"-long gooseneck is now only a little shorter than its key competitors, and there's no doubt that TuneBase FM is very stable in part because of its modest length, we still think that it could seriously benefit from extension. And the \$100 price tag now places this version of the device in more direct contention with DLO's [TransDock](#) and Griffin's [RoadTrip](#), rather than undercutting them. For those keeping score, the latest TransDock features video-out and aux-in features, though it includes no cables, while RoadTrip has a touchscreen-friendly play/pause and track feature and the ability to tune to 87.9FM, which TuneBase FM lacks.



However, only TuneBase FM is currently free from the interference by the iPhone—an important distinction, and one that was borne out in our testing. Calls properly faded music in and out without an issue, and no beeps or other noises interrupted the system's audio, even when we used visor- and ear-mounted Bluetooth kits alongside TuneBase FM to take our phone calls. If you're using only an iPod and this particular feature isn't as important to you as it is to iPhone users, the original TuneBase FM with ClearScan offers a little less and performs very well. But if you're an iPhone user looking for a complete car charging, mounting, and FM audio solution, the new TuneBase FM should be at or near the top of your list. It's highly recommended.