

Walrus Research

Perceptions of Car Talk

Weekend Program Survey

February 2012

Reality has a way of eventually getting your attention

In This Report

In the new Fall 2011 Arbitron ratings, the top NPR weekend program – yet again – is Car Talk.

Car Talk reached as many listeners as Weekend Edition Saturday and captured a higher listening audience than Wait, Wait – according to ARA’s National AudiGraphics.

Car Talk has continued to generate high ratings even as the production mode has evolved to include more repurposed material.

That is why producer Doug Berman asked us to design a perceptual survey – to see what today’s listeners are thinking about Car Talk.

This is the second in a series of reports designed to help program directors make informed decisions about weekend programming.

Review the [first report here](#).

PERCEPTIONS OF CAR TALK

- ✓ 88 percent of our respondents agree that “Car Talk is just fun, whether or not they talk about cars.”
- ✓ 70 percent DISAGREE with this statement: “It seems that Car Talk is repeating old shows.”

RATINGS WEEK TO WEEK

- ✓ Encore broadcasts do not show any (consistent) impact on the audience ratings for the show.

Positive Perceptions

In February 2012 we asked a panel of dedicated NPR listeners to evaluate eight weekend programs including Car Talk.

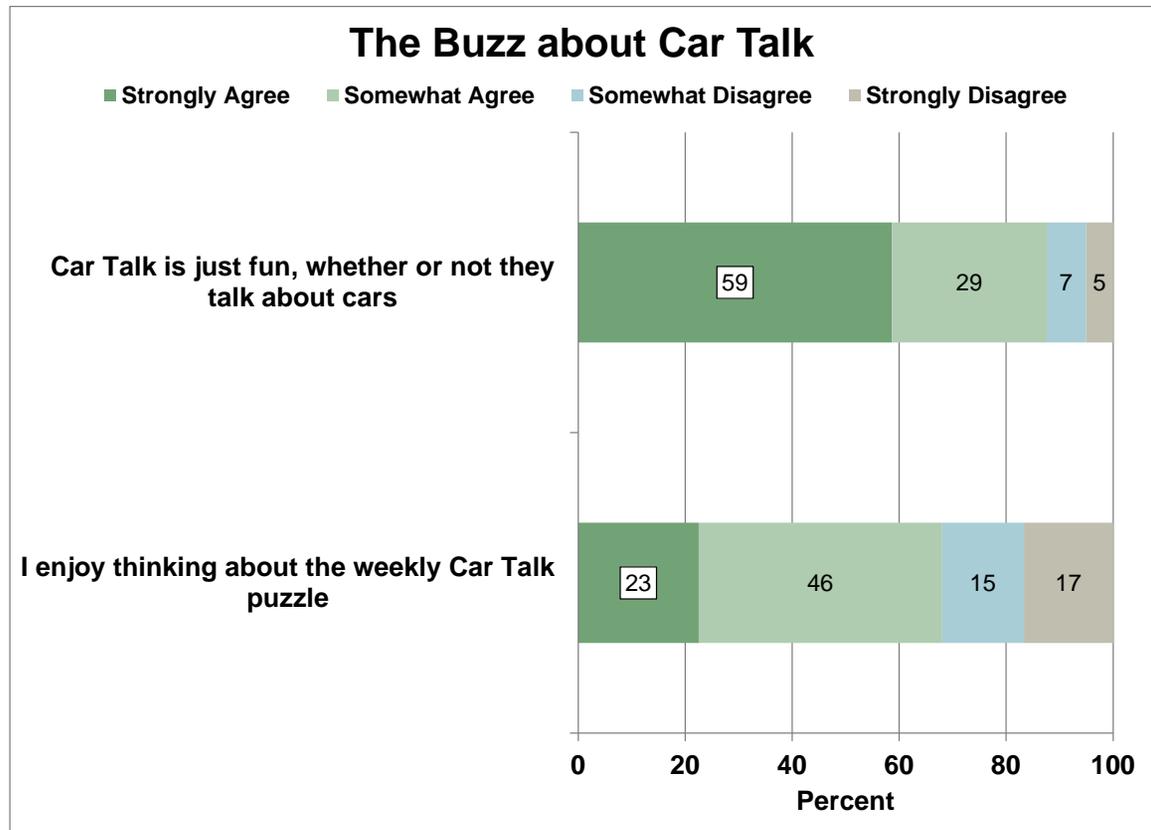
59 percent of our respondents strongly agreed that “Car Talk is just fun, whether or not they talk about cars.” Another 29 percent of respondents somewhat agreed.

23 percent strongly agreed that “I enjoy thinking about the weekly Car Talk puzzle.” A larger 46 percent somewhat agreed.

Clearly the primary appeal of Car Talk is its entertainment value, an hour of fun after a week of serious news.

The puzzle can provide additional enjoyment – a mental challenge for highly educated NPR listeners.

Now what about the possible negative perceptions of Car Talk?



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Research Design, Analysis and Report: Walrus Research

Negative Perceptions?

Program directors can check their own perceptions against these research findings:

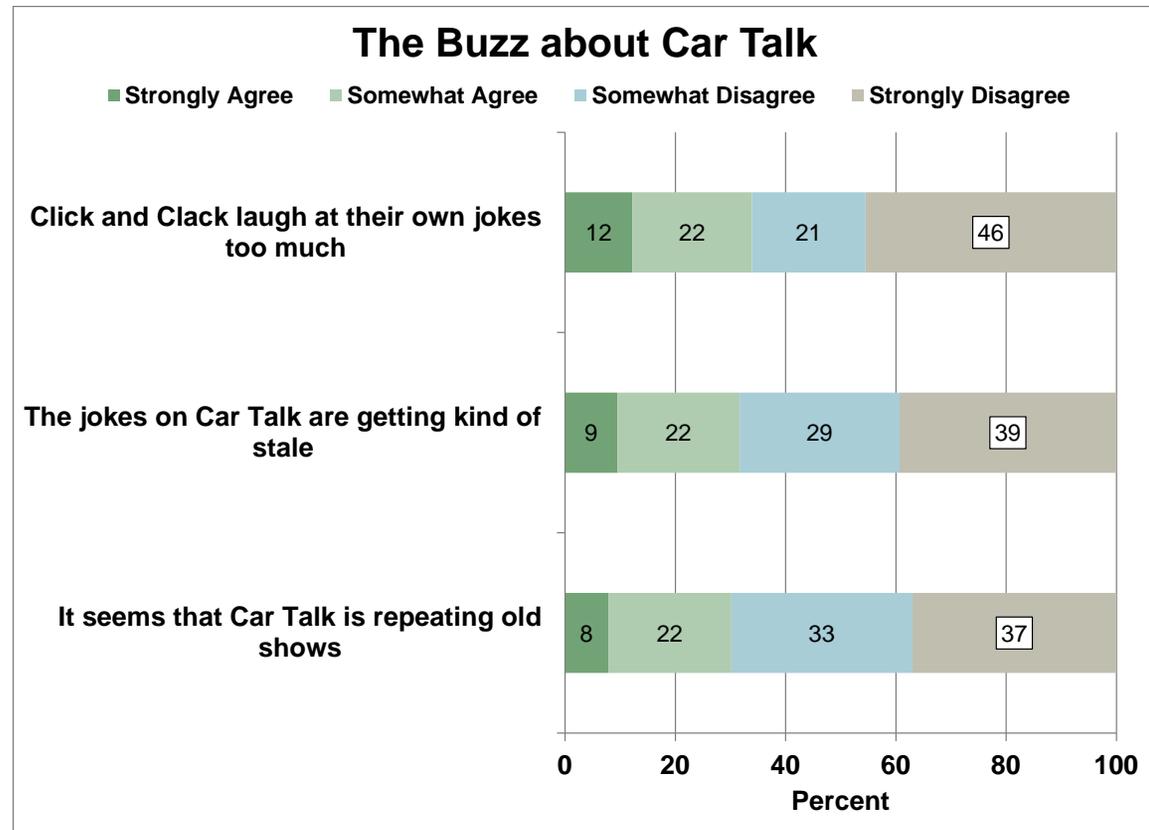
12 percent of respondents strongly agreed that “Click and Clack laugh at their own jokes too much.” But 46 percent strongly disagreed.

9 percent of respondents strongly agreed that “The jokes on Car Talk are getting kind of stale.” But 39 percent strongly disagreed.

8 percent of respondents strongly agreed that “It seems that Car Talk is repeating old shows.” But 37 percent strongly disagreed.

That last finding is a great example of perception vs. reality, because Car Talk does repurpose its best stuff.

From the listener’s perspective, it is the perception that matters. And if that listener did not hear or recall the original broadcast, it is still fresh.



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Typical Verbatims

I need a laugh at the end of the week, and a respite from political reporting.

Car Talk is a unique listening experience. Sometimes I actually learn something, all the time the boys make me feel happier.

Warm and hilarious. Just makes me smile and feel that all is right with the world. I also really enjoy the puzzler.

Their personalities, their laughs, their brotherhood, the fact that call screeners keep out the real idiots.

I love the play between the hosts and the intelligence of the humor while appearing to be low brow.

They're funny. They're an institution -- very identifiable with the history of NPR.

Some callers really do seem to get help with their car problems, all without getting terribly serious.

I love the spontaneity, humor, personalities in opposition to the more serious side of NPR.

Click and Clack do an expert job with the callers. Oh, and it is very funny.

Car Talk is a nice way to begin the weekend with a couple of "friends" joking around. It is one of the few times that a call-in show doesn't get annoying because of the callers.

In a world that is filled with the awful news of the day; it is nice to know that during this hour, I'll be able to laugh.

My job is stressful and involves long hours during the week. Car Talk is my comedic relief for the week, and even has car care tips...what's not to like?

I really love the dynamic these two have with each other and their callers, and I can't help laughing out loud. A much needed break from the insanity of my weekly life.

I love car talk! Click and Clack make me laugh and care even a little bit about cars, which I never did before.

I've been listening for years. It's become part of my weekend routine and their happiness makes me happy.

Love it--best thing to hear to get in a better mood!

Car Talk has become a "friend" I enjoy catching up with the click and clack brothers, rarely do I miss them on the radio and I download the pod cast to revisit the show while driving.

Less Typical Verbatims

The guys' act is getting a bit old. And my father taught me to despise men who laughed at their own jokes.

I enjoy the show. Love listening to it as often as possible. However, war is personally important to me. Car Talk is not.

Nostalgia - I love the show in theory but I don't make a point to listen or download the podcast. If it's on when the radio happens to be on, I listen.

It is frivolous humor about cars and life in general, need I say more? I enjoy the show but I don't value it the same way I do with in-depth reporting and analysis of current events in the news.

I'm not especially fond of the "credits" segment at the end of the show. They're a little too long.

They are a legend! I don't listen frequently but I check in from time to time and I always learn something.

The guys are just a little wearing after a while. Years ago I did listen, now I find myself turning them off.

These guys don't mean any harm, but they entertain themselves primarily, and not me.

I like the Car Talk guys but have been listening on-and-off for years...kind of "been there, done that".

Calls never relate to my car (Prius). I find those guys kind of annoying. I do like the weekly puzzler, though.

Oy! The voices.

Weekly PPM Analysis

As Car Talk began repurposing more shows, Doug Berman asked NPR's Ben Robins to analyze the PPM ratings week by week.

On this chart you can see the AQH and daily cume for Car Talk in 18 important markets across 28 weeks of 2009/2010.

The research question:

- ✓ Were Car Talk's audience ratings adversely affected by airing repeats of past shows?

The answer:

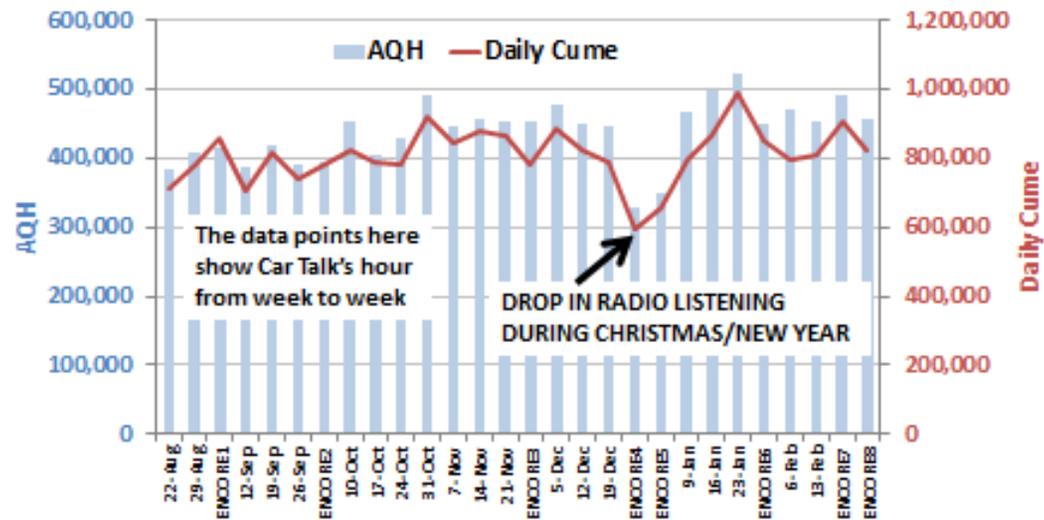
- ✓ No, not according to Arbitron's PPM ratings

This is not surprising, since less than 10 percent of a station's weekly cume hears any given quarter hour of programming.



Car Talk Encores vs. New Shows

Audience ratings for 8 recent encores did not show any consistency in performance



Source: Arbitron Analysis Tool, Metro Persons 12+, Car Talk Daypart

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NPR Research PPM Analysis

Methodology: Weekly ppm ratings for the following npr member stations: w NYC-FM, KPCC, WBEZ, KQED, KERA, KUHF, WABE, WHYY, WAMU, WBUR, WUOM, WLRN, KUOW, KJZZ, KNOW, KPBS, KWUU, and KCFR.

August 2009-March 2010, metro persons 12+

Encore dates are 9/5, 10/3, 11/28, 12/26 2009 and 1/2, 1/30, 2/20, and 2/27

Brief Comment

Car Talk works because it sounds live.

Thorough editing results in greater consistency than any truly live call-in show.

In fact, in our perceptual survey we had several respondents who praised the way Car Talk handles callers:

It is one of the few times that a call-in show doesn't get annoying because of the callers.

According to our perceptual survey as well as the PPM ratings, the repurposing of content is a non-issue to even the most dedicated listeners.

Car Talk continues to deliver audience precisely because it has never been live, it has always been highly produced.

Bailey

Method

While this perceptual research was commissioned by the producer of Car Talk, the design, analysis and interpretation is by Walrus Research.

We are grateful to Lori Kaplan, Ben Robins and Sarah Withrow of NPR Research, who gave Doug Berman access to NPR's panel of listeners.

The N or sample size was 574.

As volunteers, our sample did not represent all segments of the weekly cume. 16 percent of our unweighted respondents have doctoral degrees and 39 percent earned a master's degree. As dedicated NPR listeners, 95 percent have given money.

Demographically, the sample was more representative of the broad NPR audience – 50 percent are 45-64 Boomers and 33 percent 25-44.

We applied statistical weighting to balance the sample by men/women.

Walrus Research is an independent audience research firm with an established record of quantitative and qualitative projects for public radio stations, national producers and networks.

Non-proprietary publications for major research projects including *Grow The Audience*, *Audience 2010*, NPR's *Local News Initiative*, *The Public Radio Tracking Study* and all of the PRPD *Core Values* studies are available for download at www.WalrusResearch.com.