

## **DETROIT PUTS FM ON WHEELS:**

The first known FM radio installation into a car did not happen in Detroit. If the claim made on page 40 of *Broadcasting Magazine* on January 5, 1942 is accurate, that honor goes to Milwaukee where REL installed a crude FM radio into the automobile owned by Walter J. Damm, the General Manager of W55M, in 1941. This radio was far from practical—it was controlled by a crystal and so would only tune 45.5 MHz—but it allegedly was a functional radio. By the early 1960s, FM radios in cars had become much more practical and commonplace. As mentioned above, this was facilitated in part by the FCC's decision in the early 1960's following interference testing in San Francisco (KPEN) and Philadelphia (WFIL-FM originally W53PH), to permit circular (vertical and horizontal) polarization that vastly improved FM reception with automobile antennas. FM was largely immune from the fading that plagued AM when driving under overpasses or on streets that pass under buildings.

In 1965, Chevrolet introduced what was probably the first ever-high fidelity FM Stereo OEM installation. Once the factory AM-FM radio was installed (at \$125.00), a Stereo adapter could be ordered or dealer-installed for \$99.00 additional (Delco Part Number 986376). This device was a "balance box" with four knobs that mounted flush under the instrument panel in such a way that it looked like an extension of the heater controls. It connected to the radio by removing a jumper plug. It also included four speakers, two that replaced the cowl vents, and two that mounted behind the rear seat. Once it was turned on, it defeated all the radio controls except the tuner. It included a green "Chevy" emblem that served as the Stereo indicator light. An article about the 1965 ½ Caprice option group in the July, 1965 *Car Life Magazine* described this installation and indicated that Chevrolet had to eventually retrofit a new antenna to solve a minor ignition noise problem experienced by some owners. Once that was done, it provided spectacular performance (the article says it made the inside of the car "sound like Carnegie Hall") years before 8-track or cassette tape were available.