



AUDIOVOX®

DVR 300 HD GPS -

The black box for your car



- + Image quality: 1,0
- + Practice: 1,1
- + Configuration: 1,1
- + Overall rating: 1,0
- + Price/performance: Excellent



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The black box for your car

When a meteor crashed to the earth in Chelyabinsk in Russia in February 2013, there were a surprising number of video recordings of the event. The majority of these came from dashcams, which are extremely popular in the country. These devices are mounted behind the windscreen to film a driver's journey. This type of car camera is also manufactured by Audiovox - and we decided to put it to the test. Using a dashcam can be great fun. If you happen to drive through a particularly impressive landscape, for example, or perform a slight drift during your driver safety training, you will be able to record it with the Audiovox dashcam. The compact camera is also helpful in the event of a crash, as it records the course of events leading up to the incident, thereby providing potentially valuable evidence. This alone is worth the investment of around €150. But it's not only for accidents where the camera is advantageous, as it also documents unexpected events such as the aforementioned meteor strike. If you have ever seen one of these videos on the news, you will have noticed that the quality is quite impressive. This is especially true of the DVR 300, as it records in Full-HD quality and 30 frames per second. A maximum 32 GB of storage space is available, however, to use this you will need to insert a corresponding micro SD card into the device. This isn't supplied, but that's not necessarily a bad thing, because nowadays you will usually find several of these micro SD cards lying around the house. An important fact to mention at this point is that the card must be at least class 4 or higher; an old card from the back of your desk drawer will not be able to fulfil the required standard. Fortunately, you can pick up these types of memory cards for just a few euros. Incidentally, around 100 MB of disk space is required for each minute of video, which means a maximum recording time of around five hours and 20 minutes is possible. The maximum recording capacity offered by the integrated memory is around half an hour. Subsequently, you will need to recharge the DVR 300 via your PC and a USB cable or via the cigarette lighter in your car. This is a process you may well be familiar with when using portable navigation devices. An added bonus of connecting the device to a cigarette lighter is that the camera will start automatically when you start the engine. This increases safety and is also a very practical feature. Otherwise, the dashcam would need to be operated while driving, which is somewhat impractical when it's positioned behind the rearview mirror. Behind the rearview mirror? I hear you ask. Yes, this is the best place to mount it. Placing it here will not affect the driver's field of vision and it provides the camera with a good view of everything in front of the vehicle.

Everything at a glance

The camera is equipped with a 140 degree wide-angle lens, meaning it has a large "field of view". At the rear is a 2.7 inch monitor, which allows you to conveniently adjust all of the settings. After switching the device on, we are greeted by an animation with sound and, after just three seconds, we get to see what the camera is capturing. You can also access the menu at this point. It all works very well despite the compact dimensions. All of the operating buttons are relatively easy to access and respond reliably when pressed. Very important: Please don't look at the small screen of the camera while driving, but keep your attention on the road ahead. You can see exactly the same thing, but in 3D! All joking aside, however, we really don't recommend you play around with the camera while driving. You should familiarise yourself with how the menu navigation system works to begin with. Accessing the menu is easy - simply press the button labeled "M" at the top right of the camera. You can then skip from one menu item to the next by using the arrow buttons to the left of the monitor. When you have selected an item, press the "Rec" button (which is the top button to the right of the monitor) to access the corresponding submenu. The same functions apply as before; pressing "Rec" will also confirm your selection. If you want to switch from a submenu back to the parent menu, press "Mode" (the lower button to the right of the monitor). Pressing the "Mode" button on the home screen will access the photo option and the directory used for your recordings. The videos you have stored can be accessed here ("Rec" button) and viewed ("Rec" button again).

Just like the black box in an aeroplane

The functions include a white balance, enhanced contrast for night images and the ability to enable automatic recording when motion is detected. If this option is selected, it won't matter if you forget to press "Rec" again after taking a break at a rest stop, as the camera will do this for you. The recorded images are saved in a mov format. You are able to change the resolution, as well as alter the continuous recording option.

This function is similar to that of a black box in an aeroplane. The camera will record without taking a break, but it will only save the last three, five or ten minutes - depending on the option selected. This also means that for each new second recorded, the oldest second will be deleted. This is a practical feature, as it means you don't have to constantly delete old recordings. And in order to reconstruct the sequence of events leading up to an accident, the last three minutes before the incident are normally more than sufficient. Thanks to the built-in G-sensor, an accident is detected independently and the data is saved automatically. A GPS antenna, namely the "GPS 400", is also available from Audiovox as an optional extra, and is required for the corresponding options. The GPS function, for example, allows you to retrace the route you have travelled, including details relating to your speed. This information can also be used to prove that you were not at fault in the event of an accident. In order to read this data you will need special software and the necessary drivers, which Audiovox provides for you to download free of charge. If you want to simply copy the video files to your computer, you will not need any additional software. To do this, you just need to connect the dashcam to your computer via a USB cable and select the option "Mass storage device". You will then be able to access the memory card.

Test drive from the Lower Rhine to the Rhineland

The Audiovox dashcam can be used at extreme temperatures ranging from -20 to +65 degrees. This should be sufficient for its target audience, as anyone travelling through Death Valley or during a Siberian winter will probably already have the appropriate professional equipment on board. For our test we make do with less exotic surroundings and stay in the North Rhine-Westphalia region between Duisburg and Cologne. The first thing we notice is that installation is extremely easy. Before mounting the camera on the screen we connect all of the cables, as it's much easier doing it this way. It's then simply mounted afterwards. A suction cup and clip ensure the dashcam is held extremely securely on the screen. All of the fixtures are naturally supplied, as is a USB cable for connecting the device to a computer and a 12 V car adapter. We ran the cables along the sun visor on the passenger side to prevent them from swinging back and forth. The cable for the GPS antenna is long enough for it to be positioned on the right-hand side of the dashboard. The base has an adhesive surface to prevent it from slipping. The cable for the cigarette lighter should be sufficient for a giant "Hummer", meaning there's more than enough cable to go around for normal European vehicles. We use the factory settings for our test drive. The only thing we need to do is quickly format our micro SD card to enable it to save our recordings. This can be done via the corresponding menu item within just a few seconds. We set off and start recording. After a short time, the monitor switches off while continuing to record. This prevents any distraction - a brightly illuminated monitor would be extremely off-putting, especially when driving in the dark. We record our test shots during the day as well as at night. The quality is very good both on the highway and in the city, although the recordings are naturally lighter in built-up areas thanks to the street lighting. Saying that though, the light thrown by our car's headlights illuminates the highway sufficiently to clearly record what's going on in front of the car. We therefore don't rely on the auxiliary light function offered by the dashcam. The built-in microphone is also powerful enough to record all of the sounds generated - from the music on your car radio, to the ticking of the indicator and other usual road noise. If this is something you don't want, you can simply turn off the audio recording option. Unfortunately, we didn't encounter an emergency vehicle with its sirens blazing or a procession of cars, therefore we can't evaluate how well the external traffic noises are recorded. Ultimately, however, this will also depend on the vehicle and how much it dampens external noise.

Conclusion

The DVR-300 dashcam by Audiovox is ideal for providing evidence in the event of an accident, as well as for documenting exciting road trips. Operation is very easy after a short familiarisation period and the recording process is virtually fully automatic. The quality of the recordings is razor sharp; the images are surprisingly rich in detail and can be clearly seen, even during heavy rain or in the dark.