AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The Comprehensive Technical Guide to Audi Navigation Plus (RNS-E): Engineering, Installation, and Modern Integration

Published: May 28, 2025 | Index ID: #44

The evolution of in-car infotainment has been one of the most rapid technological shifts in the automotive industry over the last two decades. At the heart of this evolution for Audi enthusiasts and engineers alike is the **Audi Navigation Plus**, specifically the **Radio Navigation System – E (RNS-E)**. Originally introduced to bridge the gap between basic radio units and the fully integrated Multi Media Interface (MMI) systems found in high-end luxury sedans, the RNS-E remains a cornerstone of Audi's legacy hardware. This article provides an exhaustive technical analysis of the RNS-E system, ranging from its historical engineering roots to modern-day modifications like Android Auto integration and cloud-based Function on Demand services.

1. Theoretical Framework: Understanding the RNS-E Architecture

The Audi Navigation Plus system is fundamentally a **double-DIN (2-DIN)** head unit that combines satellite navigation, radio, and multi-media playback into a single interface. Unlike earlier analog systems, the RNS-E utilizes a digital signal processing (DSP) architecture to manage audio-visual output. The system architecture is built around the **CAN-bus (Controller Area Network)**protocol, which allows the head unit to communicate with other vehicle modules such as the instrument cluster (DIS - Driver Information System), steering wheel controls, and the Bluetooth telephone module.

Key Hardware Components

- Display Technology: The standard RNS-E features a 6.5-inch 16:9 TFT display. Early models (192 series) utilized a 400x240 pixel resolution, while the 2010+ 'PU' models (193 series) upgraded to a high-resolution 800x480 LED-backlit screen.
- Media Handling: The unit features a motorized fold-down screen that reveals two SD/MMC card slots and a central DVD-ROM drive. The DVD drive is strictly dedicated to navigation maps, whereas the SD slots (limited to 2GB in early versions and 32GB SDHC in later versions) handle MP3 audio playback.
- Processor and Logic: The system runs on a proprietary embedded operating system capable of calculating real-time route offsets based on TMC (Traffic Message Channel) data received via the FM radio tuner.

2. Core Mechanics: Navigation and GPS Signal Processing

The operational core of the Audi Navigation Plus is its ability to interpret **Global Positioning System (GPS)**data and overlay it onto vector-based map data stored on the DVD-ROM. The system relies on a dedicated GPS antenna, typically mounted on the roof (shark fin) or hidden within the dashboard for retrofitted units.

Mathematical Positioning and Dead Reckoning

Audi's engineering team implemented a **Dead Reckoning**algorithm to ensure navigation continuity in environments where GPS signals are weak, such as tunnels or dense urban canyons. The system uses the following inputs for its calculations:

1. GALA (Geschwindigkeitsabhängige Lautstärkenanpassung): The speed pulse signal from the ABS controller.

2. Gyroscope: An internal solid-state gyroscope that detects changes in vehicle heading.
3. Satellite Trilateration: Standard GPS coordinates derived from a minimum of four satellites to determine 3D position (latitude, longitude, and altitude).

By combining the speed pulse (distance traveled) and the gyroscope data (direction), the RNS-E can estimate the vehicle's position on the map even when the **Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR)**of the GPS satellites drops below the usable threshold of approximately 28-30 dB-Hz.

3. Technical Comparison: RNS-E Generations and MMI Systems

For technicians and owners, distinguishing between the various iterations of Audi's navigation hardware is critical for compatibility and coding. The table below outlines the primary technical differences between the standard RNS-E, the updated RNS-E 'PU', and the high-end MMI 3G system.

Feature	RNS-E (Pre-2010)	RNS-E 'PU' (Post-2010)	MMI 3G (High)
Display Resolution	400 x 240 (LCD)	800 x 480 (LED)	800 x 480 (TFT)
SD Card Capacity	2GB (Non-SDHC)	32GB (SDHC)	32GB (SDHC) x 2
Processor Speed	Approx. 300 MHz	Approx. 600 MHz	Dual Core 800 MHz
Map Media	DVD-ROM	DVD-ROM	Internal HDD (40GB)
Audio Streaming	Analog AUX only	A2DP via external module	Integrated Bluetooth/AMI
Glossy Frame	No (Matte)	Yes (Piano Black)	Integrated Dashboard

4. Practical Implementation: Retrofitting and Installation Procedures

Retrofitting an Audi Navigation Plus into a vehicle originally equipped with a **Symphony I or II**head unit is a multi-phase engineering task. This process is particularly common in the A6 (C5), A4 (B6/B7), and A3 (8P) platforms.

Phase 1: Physical Integration and GPS Antenna Placement

The first challenge is the transition from ISO connectors to the **Quadlock** wiring standard used by the RNS-E. A conversion harness is required to map the following pins: **Constant 12V, Ground, K-Line (Diagnostics), and CAN-High/CAN-Low**. For GPS antenna installation, the antenna must have a clear line of sight to the sky. While factory installations use the roof, a common 'hidden' install involves placing the magnetic antenna atop the instrument cluster or behind the center air vents, ensuring no metal shielding interferes with the 1575.42 MHz GPS frequency.

Phase 2: VCDS Coding and Adaptation

Once physically installed, the vehicle's **Gateway (Address 19)**must be informed of the new hardware. Using a VCDS (VAG-COM Diagnostic System) interface, the technician must perform the following steps:

1. STG 19 (CAN Gateway) -> Installation List: Enable "37-Navigation".
2. STG 37 (Navigation) -> Coding: Set the software configuration based on the vehicle chassis. For example, a code of 0301717 might represent an Audi A4 with a multi-function steering wheel and Bose sound system.
3. Tire Circumference Adaptation: To ensure accurate dead reckoning, the exact tire circumference (in millimeters) must be entered into Channel 001 of the adaptation settings.

5. Advanced Integration: Bringing Android Auto to Legacy Hardware

A significant trend in the Audi community is the integration of modern smartphone interfaces into the RNS-E. Since the RNS-E does not natively support USB data transfer for video, engineers have developed **Video-in-Motion (VIM)** hacks and RGB-to-Composite converters to inject smartphone signals.

The Engineering Workflow for Android Auto Integration

To achieve a functional Android Auto experience, the following hardware stack is typically deployed:

- Multimedia Interface Module: A box that intercepts the RNS-E's video input (usually intended for a TV tuner or backup camera).
- Microcontroller (e.g., Raspberry Pi or Dedicated SoC): Runs a 'Headunit Reloaded' emulator to process the Android Auto protocol.

- I2C to CAN Bus Bridge: This allows the RNS-E's physical buttons and scroll wheel to send commands back to the smartphone, simulating a native touch-free experience.

By leveraging the **RGBS (Red, Green, Blue, Sync)**signal pins on the 32-pin connector at the rear of the RNS-E, developers can project a digital signal onto the TFT screen with minimal latency, effectively modernizing a 20-year-old hardware platform.

6. Troubleshooting and Operational Challenges

Despite its robust build quality, the Audi Navigation Plus system faces several common failure modes that require technical intervention.

Laser Lens Degradation

The most frequent issue is the "Disc Read Error." This is often caused by the accumulation of dust on the **SF-HD4 laser pickup**. Over time, the laser's power output (measured in milliwatts) drops below the threshold required to read dual-layer navigation DVDs. Cleaning the lens with isopropyl alcohol is a temporary fix; however, total replacement of the DVD mechanism is often necessary for long-term reliability.

GPS Signal Loss

If the unit shows the vehicle is in a different city or the "Satellites in View" count remains at zero, the fault typically lies in the **coaxial Fakra connection**or a failed active antenna. Technicians should use a multimeter to check for a 5V DC offset on the center pin of the GPS connector, which powers the antenna's internal Low Noise Amplifier (LNA).

Error Symptom	Probable Cause	Diagnostic Step
Unit resets randomly	CAN-bus interference or overheating	Check cooling fan operation via VCDS Output Test
No sound from speakers	Bose pin grounding or amp failure	Verify Coding (Channel 02 in Navigation)
Screen flicker	Ribbon cable fatigue	Inspect internal 30-pin FFC cable for micro-tears
Inaccurate positioning	Incorrect tire circumference value	Re-calibrate Channel 01 Adaptation

7. The Future of Audi Infotainment: Function on Demand (FoD)

While the RNS-E represents the pinnacle of physical media-based navigation, Audi has shifted toward **Function on Demand (FoD)** via the **Audi Connect**ecosystem. In modern MMI systems, navigation is no longer a permanent hardware feature but a software-defined service that can be purchased via the myAudi app.

This transition marks a significant shift in automotive engineering. Where the RNS-E required a physical DVD and manual VCDS coding, modern systems utilize **Over-the-Air (OTA)** updates and **Feature-as-a-Service (FaaS)** models. However, the core principles of GPS trilateration and CAN-bus communication established during the RNS-E era continue to serve as the foundation for these cloud-connected platforms. The ability to activate navigation functions after the vehicle has left the factory highlights the importance of the digital backbone that began with the integration of the first Navigation Plus units.

The Audi Navigation Plus (RNS-E) remains a testament to durable automotive engineering. Its modular design allows it to remain relevant in the age of smartphones, while its integration with the vehicle's diagnostic systems provides a level of cohesion that aftermarket units struggle to replicate. Whether through the restoration of original components or the installation of sophisticated Android Auto bridges, maintaining these systems requires a deep understanding of both legacy analog signals and modern digital protocols. As we move further into the era of software-defined vehicles, the RNS-E stands as a landmark in the journey toward the fully connected cockpit.

Baca Juga (Artikel Terkait)

- **Comprehensive Engineering Analysis of the Honda CBR1000RR-R Fireblade SP: Performance, Aerodynamics, and Electronic Integration**
  URL: http://www.amotionselfie.com/honda-cbr1000rr-r-fireblade-sp-technical-analysis.pdf
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