

## **Who's Driving?**

### **Autonomous cars may be entering the most dangerous phase**

*Autopilot controls cannot yet function completely without human intervention – but they're good enough to give us a false sense of security.*

When California police officers approached a Tesla stopped in the centre of a busy road outside San Francisco, they found the driver asleep in the car. The driver told them his car was in 'autopilot', Tesla's semi-autonomous driver assist system.

We often hear that autonomous cars will make the roads safer by reducing human error, the primary cause of accidents. However, car makers have a long way to go before they can eliminate the driver completely. In the meantime, automated technologies, such as autopilot and obstacle detection, are being added to cars to make them partly automated. These technologies should only be used with an attentive driver.

Research has shown, however, that some drivers overestimate the technology's capabilities and feel so secure in their automated cars that they start to do other things, like look at their phones. Because of this, when the car encounters a situation where the human needs to intervene, the driver can be slow to react.

Waymo, Google's self-driving car project, noticed the problem when they were testing a 'level 3' automated system. During testing Waymo recorded film of drivers texting, applying make-up and even sleeping while their cars were travelling at high speeds. They found that human drivers were not monitoring the road carefully enough to be able to take control when needed. Because of this, they decided not to continue testing semi-automation, but to concentrate on producing fully automatic cars instead.

Carmakers have now started to add extra safety features to compensate for distracted driving. Tesla drivers, for example, can be locked out of autopilot if they don't keep their hands on the steering wheel. And Tesla's CEO, Elon Musk, remains confident about his company's autonomous technology, suggesting that it will actually be possible for drivers to sleep in their cars in the near future. Presumably without being arrested by the police...

(source: *The Guardian*)

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