

How many of you have seen the movie Demolition Man? This 1993 movie featured Sylvester Stallone as a police officer who wakes up in the future. When I first saw the movie I thought the technology of a self-driving car was far-fetched. Well according to an article in the Wall Street Journal, this technology could be offered up in the middle years of this decade.

The term for these cars is autonomous which essentially means the cars can drive themselves. The technology that will go in to these cars will focus on the following components: Electronic Steering, Traffic jam Assist, Enhanced navigation systems, Adaptive Cruise control & blind spot detection. Each of these components will help you be a little more relaxed in the driver's seat or maybe more nervous, depending on your trust in technology. As a side note, cars are not the only autonomous vehicles being considered. My husband Eric was part of an experiment exploring the idea of an autonomous snow cat (snow groomer) back in 2000 and they even have an autonomous snow plow competition.

For a lot of people this would take the fun out of driving but for others, imagine what you could do with your commute time if you didn't have to keep your eyes on the road. Would this lower or raise your blood pressure not to mention your insurance premiums? It could lower both by reducing the risk of accidents. Think about the drunk driver behind the wheel, would this car make him safer to be around? You bet it would because he is less likely to be swerving or crossing the middle lines or running a red light. What about the lady on her way to work putting on her makeup? No questions, it would make her a safer driver. Who would be responsible if your vehicle is involved in a crash? This is a question that a law professor is asking because if the human is not in control of the car and a computer is should the driver carry the liability insurance or should the manufacturer? It is suggested that there would have to be legislation shielding auto makers from state liability claims.

Google already has a fleet of about eight cars testing early versions of this technology. They use sophisticated sensors and mapping data to locate the car and plot a route. Cadillac is developing a feature called "Super Cruise" which allows a vehicle to drive itself on the highway by adjusting speed, staying in a lane and avoiding other cars. While this is not currently available, they are offering a driver assist feature called full range adaptive cruise control. This cruise control will slow the car to a stop if a vehicle ahead stops.

For every 70 million miles driven by humans there is one fatality. Google's test cars have only logged about 200,000 miles. Given the low amount of test miles, it makes me wonder if it is really a reality that this could happen in the next 2-5 years. Nevada thinks so, because they

have already passed laws allowing autonomous vehicles to operate on their roads, and California is considering similar laws.

In closing, for those that love driving like I do, Audi's product planning manager for the US says that the "self-driving technology it to keep the driver from the humdrum of driving . If you want to have fun and take the wheel then you can." I can see great merit in this hybrid approach.