

Diabologic: Home Jeeves (part 3)

by Frank Dolinar

Since last month's article describing current experiments with cars driven by artificial intelligence (AI) controlled robotics, I've been thinking about the possible advantages of such technology and comparing it to the apparent lack of natural intelligence responsible for the driving of cars I've observed on the road. Human-driven cars continue to exhibit all the "benefits" of human foibles. Here are some examples.

Speeding / Reckless Driving. Such behavior by a human driver suggests that he/she assumes that they can do whatever they want and no one else on the road counts. Selfish and arrogant are two words that come to mind when describing such drivers. By the way, reckless driving is defined as driving at a speed in excess of 15 mph over the posted limit.

Not stopping at STOP signs. It's as if many drivers simply can't read or don't believe STOP signs apply to them. It isn't true, of course. Traffic signage applies to everyone. Related to this are the infractions known as **Not stopping for a red light when turning right** and **Ignoring a "No Turn on Red" sign**.

Blocking crosswalks. Blocking crosswalks can cause several different kinds of problems.

- 1) it interferes with the ability of a pedestrian to walk across the street. This is illegal. When cars are stopped by a red light, the pedestrians have the right-of-way.
- 2) for cars in the left hand or the designated left turn lane, blocking the crosswalk can also place them in a position to interfere with cars coming from the right and turning left in front of them.
- 3) stopping partly in an intersection, so close to (or under) the traffic signal that the driver (of anything except a convertible) can't actually see the signal.

Blocking intersections. Driving into an intersection but, because of traffic, being unable to get through the intersection is a serious no-no. It's the occasion for traffic jams and the seed of gridlock. If you can't safely drive completely through an intersection, you should not enter the intersection in the first place.

Failing to signal. Have you ever had someone in front of you brake for no apparent reason, only to discover that they intend to turn, but they didn't signal until they started the turn? Inconsiderate.

Following too close. Humans often drive dangerously close behind other cars. For some this is a failure to understand the physics and the time frames involved should the driver in the leading car engage the brakes. For others, this close approach is a form of intimidation of the driver of the leading car.

Lapses of attention. Instead of paying attention to the conditions of the traffic, the road, and the weather, many people talk with a passenger, adjust makeup, read a newspaper, or talk on a mobile phone. All significant risks. Too many people stop paying attention once they've learned how to drive beyond the rudiments, when they think it's automatic, and when they've convinced themselves that they know what they're doing and nothing can surprise them. They can be proven utterly wrong in fractions of a second.

The AI/Robotic Alternative

An AI-driven car would obey the rules tirelessly and regardless of location, time, or season. It would understand the physics and the engineering safety margins needed.

Initially such AI/Robotic systems would likely be safety features, as are already being offered on some luxury cars. We would still be able to drive our cars ourselves.

In time, there will probably be high-speed lanes on some limited access roads (e.g. Interstate highways) available only to AI/robotic driven cars.

These cars will very likely be much, much safer, more fuel efficient, and cost less to insure than their human-driven counterparts.

It seems there isn't much downside to letting your cybernetic chauffeur be your designated driver.