

Stop the Madness! We Should Never Allow Driverless Cars and Trucks

First, let's distinguish between "driverless" and "self-driving" cars. My Tesla is self-driving when I employ its autopilot features, but I must keep my hands on the steering wheel. "Driverless" means there's no driver — also called "autonomous" cars.

I have driven over 75,000 miles using Tesla's self-driving features, giving me plenty of time to imagine what it would be like to have the car drive itself without me ready to take control at any moment.

Tesla's current autopilot features are twofold. First, there is "traffic-aware cruise control," which maintains a safe distance from vehicles ahead, including braking to a full stop when necessary. It also reads speed limit signs and alerts me when I'm going over by an amount I specify. Then there's "auto-steer," which reads the highway lines and keeps the car centered in its lane. The car will even change lanes if I use the turn signal — but only if it's safe and doesn't involve crossing a solid line.

In my experience, these "driver assistance" features make for safer driving. When auto-steer is used, the car reminds me to keep to my hands on the wheel. The car will sound an alarm and display a message if it hasn't sensed my hands on the wheel for a minute or two. If I ignore the instruction to put my hands back on the wheel within a minute, both cruise control and auto-steer are disabled, causing the car to decelerate, which gets my attention! I can't use those features again until I stop and put the car in Park.

I think it's just fine that Tesla continues to improve the car's driver assistance features, but I'm convinced that going full-driverless would be a big mistake. Accidents involving self-driving cars have recently made the news, although it has been reported that in each accident another, human controlled car was at fault. In one video you can see a car careening diagonally towards you from across the highway.

We all have been taught the importance of driving defensively. What such videos demonstrate is that a self-driving car can't drive "defensively." A human driver could have seen those other cars coming and taken evasive action. A human could detect a ball coming into the street and look for a child chasing it. A human could detect another driver driving erratically and know to keep a safe distance while perhaps contacting the police.

Current self-driving software depends on lane painting. More than once my Tesla's auto-steer function has attempted to follow lines that would have taken me into oncoming vehicles if I hadn't reacted immediately.

How would a driverless car negotiate an intersection when there's a power failure and the traffic lights are dark? How would it react to a cat, squirrel or debris on

the roadway? How about potholes? A lot of day-to-day driving entails making eye contact with other drivers and responding to other drivers doing unpredictable or illegal maneuvers.

What about an alternate merge where two lanes reduce to one lane? Or an on-ramp where only one car should proceed on each green light — and merge while accelerating?

Would the driverless car slow down when a deer has finished crossing and look for others that may be lurking nearby, possibly obscured by foliage?

Would a driverless car be able to follow the hand gestures of a traffic cop or someone guiding cars into a grassy field for parking at a social event?

You may recall that the recently suspended driverless experiment was being conducted in Phoenix. Why? Probably because their roads are never covered by snow and are rarely obscured by rain. How is a driverless vehicle going to negotiate a snow-packed roadway or visually detect black ice?

The number of possible hazards and surprises is so great that no geek in Silicon Valley would be able to tweak the software into predicting and handling all of them. As I drive my Tesla using auto-steer regularly, I have experienced numerous such scenarios, which is what inspired me to write a column on his subject.

Now, let's talk about trucks. A couple of years ago, a self-driving Budweiser semi made a run from its Ft. Collins brewery to Colorado Springs — with CDOT vehicles and State Patrol cars surrounding it for safe-

ty. A trucker was in the cab for safety, but can you imagine that a driver might *ever* not be needed to monitor that truck's operation? Remember, airplanes can fly and land themselves on auto-pilot, but the FAA requires at least one pilot to be in his or her seat at all times — and pilots don't have to watch for cars, pedestrians, animals, bicycles and potholes, or even other airplanes most of the time.

Truck drivers are known for their diligent communication and service to fellow truckers and motorists. They contribute to keeping our highways running smoothly, sometimes coming to the aid of fellow truckers or motorists. Let's keep them on the job, and give them improved driver assistance features to make their driving safer, versus endangering the rest of us by removing them from their trucks.

Share your own thoughts at JimSmithBlog.com.

REAL ESTATE TODAY



By **JIM SMITH, Realtor®**

Come to Golden for Our Annual Community Garage Sales May 12

Each spring we sponsor a community garage sale in two of Golden's high-end neighborhoods — the **Village at Mountain Ridge** west of Hwy. 93 in north Golden and **Stonebridge at Eagle Ridge** off Heritage Road in south Golden. Together there are 540 homes, and about 40 of them will be participating. See their addresses and a description of what each is selling at www.GoldenGarageSale.com. Directions to each subdivision are on that website. It all happens this Saturday, **May 12th, 8 a.m. to noon. The rain date is next Saturday, May 19th.**

2-Story Ralston Valley Home Just Listed by Susan Dixon



This beautiful home at **13375 W. 72nd Circle** boasts a professionally remodeled kitchen, with granite counter tops and stainless steel appliances. The open floor plan includes a vaulted ceiling with a stairway and balcony overlooking a spacious great room with a fireplace. This home is perfect for social gatherings, with the indoor space extending outdoors to a large deck with a hot tub. The fully finished basement adds plenty of useable space, including a bonus room, full bathroom and two rooms that could be used as office, den, exercise room or nonconforming bedroom. The good sized yard is completely fenced and offers plenty of space to garden, play and socialize. Mature trees surround the property and give shade and comfort to the home. You can see more pictures and see a drone video of this home on its website, www.RalstonValleyHome.info. Call Susan at **720-982-0803** for a private showing.



Jim Smith
Broker/Owner
Golden Real Estate, Inc.



CALL OR TEXT: **303-525-1851**
OFFICE PHONE: **303-302-3636**
EMAIL: Jim@GoldenRealEstate.com
WEBSITE: www.GoldenRealEstate.com
ARCHIVES: www.JimSmithColumns.com

Get this column in your inbox every Thursday!
Send your request to Jim@GoldenRealEstate.com.

Do you own a "green" home? The Metro Denver Green Homes Tour is looking for homes to feature on this year's tour on Oct. 6th. Call me at **303-525-1851** or email Jim@GoldenRealEstate.com for more info.

17695 South Golden Road, Golden 80401