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 two-fold. 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 it 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 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 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 safety reasons. 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.

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 fully finished basement adding 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. 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.

By JIM SMITH, Realtor®