

FUTUREPROOF

How driverless cars will change the world

A driverless car with a top speed of 60 mph has recently been revealed by a well-known tech firm. It may not look like it, but this machine and its successors are going to change your life. Today we explain how.



A No matter what we like to believe, humans are unfortunately no good at driving. The fact that 1.2m people are killed every year on roads worldwide is a shocking and sad reminder of that. Unlike us, driverless cars will never drive drunk and will not be able to break the speed limit, take reckless* chances or race their mates away from traffic lights. They will never doze off*, lose concentration or send a text message from behind the wheel. Nor will they get angry, frustrated or competitive. In short, they will be a lot, lot safer than we are.

B Finding a place to park will no longer be our problem – our car will handle it for us. Once we arrive at our destination we will hop out at the front door and leave the car to park itself using its superior parking skills. Later, when we need it, we will be able to summon* it with our smartphone. No more parking tickets, no more multiple attempts at reverse parking and no more endlessly driving in circles looking for an empty parking space.

C Think how much of our time is wasted on driving. Those daily journeys to work or school soon add up to hundreds of hours a year. Sure, driving is occasionally enjoyable – the winding country road on a summer's day or the empty motorway late at night, for instance – but, unless you are a Formula 1 driver, the vast majority of the time you spend behind the wheel is likely to be tedious and frustrating. Why not read a book, watch a film, or chat with family and friends and let the car drive itself instead?

D There are known to be approximately 7.5 billion people on our planet and it is estimated that well over a billion cars crowd our roads. For those who travel regularly on four wheels, it may sometimes seem that all of them are gathered in a never-ending traffic jam between where you are and where you need to be! Using sophisticated technology, driverless cars will be able to travel in convoys, centimetres apart, without the unnecessary braking that slows down traffic and creates jams.

E If we can solve congestion*, perhaps we won't need to continue digging up the country's green spaces to create huge eight-lane motorways which, in turn, encourage even more traffic. The impact of these huge roads on nature does not stop once their construction is complete, of course. Noise and light pollution seriously disturb animal populations and there is of course the danger to both animals and motorists of potential collisions. Not only could the reduction in congestion resulting from driverless cars save vast areas of our countryside, but also huge amounts of money. This money could then be spent on health, education and other more beneficial causes instead.

F One great plus of driverless cars is the freedom to travel that they will bring to those who cannot drive. It is unlikely that a driving licence will be required in order to operate a driverless car, so, theoretically, children could 'drive' themselves to karate practice, Sunday football or school, and Grandma could take herself to have her hair done on a Saturday morning! Provided that a trustworthy and secure system can be developed, the school run could become a thing of the past and parents could find themselves with an extra half hour of 'me-time' every morning.

The world's first large-scale test of driverless cars has already been carried out, but it will be some time before you can actually go to a car dealership and get your hands on one. There are many complex legal issues regarding their security, privacy and safety which need to be resolved first. However, it seems very likely that within our lifetime they will be a common and very welcome sight on our roads. In years to come, rather than saying 'I'm taking the car', we may find ourselves saying 'The car is taking me!'

GLOSSARY

reckless (adj) – not caring or worrying about the possible dangerous results of your actions

doze off (phr. v) – to fall asleep, especially when you did not intend to

summon (v) – to order someone to come to a place

congestion (n) – overcrowding on the road caused by too much traffic

Exercise 1: Read the text and label paragraphs A–F with the headings below.

There is one extra heading.

Cost

Free time

Traffic

Parking

Environment

Safety

Freedom

Exercise 2: Read the text again and answer the questions.

- 1 What causes of traffic accidents could be eliminated thanks to driverless cars?
- 2 What technology would car owners use to get their vehicles back after parking?
- 3 What activities could people spend time on instead of driving?
- 4 How can driverless cars reduce traffic congestion?
- 5 What impact could driverless cars have on green areas?
- 6 Which groups of people could benefit most from these cars?
- 7 What issues need to be solved before driverless cars become commonly available?

Exercise 3: Complete the collocations to do with driving with words from the article.

1. drive after consuming alcohol – drive _____ / _____ driving
2. drive faster than the law permits – _____ the speed limit
3. driving a motor vehicle – _____ the wheel
4. reversing into a parking space – _____ parking
5. driving round and round because you are lost or looking for a parking space -
driving in _____
6. small countryside roads with lots of bends – _____ country roads
7. very wide roads used to travel long distances – _____ motorways
8. a place where cars are sold – a car _____
9. a document that states you are legally qualified to drive – a driving _____

10. a regular car journey to take children to school or bring them home – the school

ANSWER KEY

Exercise 1:

Free time - Paragraph C

Traffic - Paragraph D

Parking - Paragraph B

Environment - Paragraph E

Safety - Paragraph A

Freedom – Paragraph F

Exercise 2:

1 What causes of traffic accidents could be eliminated thanks to driverless cars?

[Unlike us, driverless cars will never drink drunk...Nor they will get angry, frustrated or competitive.]

2 What technology would car owners use to get their vehicles back after parking?
smartphone

3 What activities could people spend time on instead of driving?
Read a book, watch a film, or chat with family and friends

4 How can driverless cars reduce traffic congestion?
[Using sophisticated technology ... slows down traffic and creates jams.]

5 What impact could driverless cars have on green areas?
It can save a vast of green areas.

6 Which groups of people could benefit most from these cars?
People cannot drive

7 What issues need to be solved before driverless cars become commonly available?
Their security, privacy and safety

Exercise 3:

1-drunk	2-break	3-behind	4-reverse	5-circles
6-winding	7- eight-lane	8-dealership	9-licence	10-run