Google Bots Take the Wheel in Nevada - After Hitting the DMV

[1]We're another day closer to thinking about people who own cars the same way do we think about people who own horses: A nice hobby, but no way to get to work.

The state of Nevada announced yesterday that it has granted Google the nation's first-ever license for a driverless vehicle; previously, Nevada and California had only allowed limited testing in specific areas. Road testing is the next step in the internet search company's effort to design a reliable robotic car [2], one of few side projects maintained since founder Larry Page took over as CEO last spring.

Driverless cars offer a huge opportunity to save time, money and resources; most cars are idle most of the time, so the ability to have them pilot themselves will make transportation systems far more efficient [3]. The improvements in quality of life—and in the environment—could be significant if fleets of shared autonomous cars replaced individual vehicles.

With only one car on the road, of course, this is more a publicity stunt from Nevada (no stranger to a big show), designed to showcase how the state embraces tech companies at a time when public officials are still trying to recover from the housing bust—which hit particularly hard in the development-happy desert.

The car will still require two human occupants when it's on the road in case something goes wrong, but the cars—designed by some of the same engineers

behind Google Street View—are probably safer under their own control: The only reported accident [4] of a Google car came with a person behind the wheel, unless you count another incident when one was rear-ended at a red light [5].

Nevada DMV Director Bruce Breslow was convinced of the car's safety after a few test drives. "It is a laser radar combination that sees 360, so while you can see out the front of your car, it sees sideways, behind you and everything around you and your environment," Breslow told the radio show *Marketplace* [6]. "It sees a lot more than you can see. It sees a pedestrian; a pothole; it sees three cars in front where I'm blocked by the car in front of me, but this has the laser radar that skips under that car, picks up the next one, skips under that, picks up the next one. It relaxes you quite a bit."

Breslow, complying with state laws (lobbied for by Google) that permit driverless vehicles on the road, designed the red license plate with an infinity sign on it. While Google was first in line to road test its vehicles, other companies that want to test autonomous vehicles are expected to apply for the permit.

Interested in heading for Las Vegas to snag a driverless vehicle of your own? The technology isn't quite there yet, but Nevada is already planning ahead, at least according to the DMV's website: "When autonomous vehicles are eventually made available for public use, motorists will be required to obtain a special driver license endorsement and the DMV will issue green license plates for the vehicles."

www.good.is [7]

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