The Customer

Dear Reader,

The ethics commission appointed by the German government to address the issue of self-driving and connected vehicles has issued an initial set of guidelines for lawmakers and car manufacturers. While confirming the theoretical acceptability of autonomous driving systems, the guidelines signal a need for special provisions relating to traffic safety, human dignity, freedom of choice, and data ownership. In the context of developing the guidelines, the commission formulated 20 different theses, including this especially noteworthy thesis: Measures are to be taken to ensure that clarity prevails in all driving situations as to who is responsible for any given driving task – the human or the computer.

The degree to which human drivers and information-generating computers are to interact via HMI technology is unprecedented in the automobile industry. Moreover, given the stakes involved, the systems will have to function flawlessly. While a number of important challenges remain on the way to fully automated vehicles, automobile engineers are ultimately likely to master the technical realisation with the accustomed perfection.

In contrast, another vital interface – namely, that between the manufacturer and the customer – appears to be getting short shrift. Indeed, number of experts at this year's ATZ Driver Assistance Systems Conference in Frankfurt voiced their concerns about this very subject. The automobile manufacturers naturally seek to counter such warnings, pointing out, for instance, what they regard as encouraging fleet-testing with "ordinary consumers" and car clinics.

However, a closer look at a number of interfaces reveals a certain disregard. In fact, many drivers today still don't know

what their vehicles, i.e. their driving assistants, are capable of managing. They are often unnecessarily distracted when attempting to operate ever smaller controls positioned at locations far out of line with the street view. Voice control systems would help, but they are still limited to navigation and telephone contact, as they have been for more than 15 years now! And the latest industry bulletin? Well, drivers will be free to venture out of the loop upon the introduction of level-3 automation.

What exactly are drivers allowed to devote their attention to besides driving? The answer to this question remained forthcoming at the Frankfurt ATZ Conference. How does one explain appropriate interactive, HMI behavior to customers? One conference speaker, Professor Dr. Eric Hilgendorf, legal scholar at the University of Würzburg and member of the above-mentioned ethics commission, recommends a more intensive dialogue with the purchasers of level-3 vehicles: "After all, the new forms of behavior won't be only outlined in the operating manual." Professor Hilgendorf offers interesting observations on page 46 of the present issue.

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