

Distracted

Dear Reader,

Over the past winter, it was even more obvious than in spring or summer: more and more people are using their smartphone while driving. On gloomy winter days, you can easily make out their brightly illuminated displays when overtaking a car on the motorway. And many drivers are not only telephoning, some are even sending text messages or using Google to find the nearest filling station. Such behaviour is highly dangerous and can even be fatal, as was shown by the recent rise in the number of accidents.

Distraction can be deadly, as we take in 90 % of the surrounding information through our eyes. If drivers are occupied with texting, WhatsApp, email, etc., this important sensory channel is blocked. "Unlike telephoning, reading and writing text messages requires both visual and motor skills. As longer units of meaning are being produced or received, the driver's attention is focused on the telephone display for a relatively long time and not on the road, where it belongs," said Mark Vollrath, a psychologist from the TU Braunschweig, at the 53rd Traffic Court Congress in Goslar.

In other words, someone sending a text message can neither steer nor brake. More and more people think that they are good at multitasking: "Driving? I can do it with my eyes shut." However, as the German Road Safety Council (DVR) found out during its campaign "Distracted? Stay on track!", we human beings are actually not capable of doing several things at the same time because our brain is only able to coordinate one or at most two complex activities simultaneously.

To defuse the problem, the automotive industry has set its sights on automated driving. Even today, assistance systems help us to stay in lane and keep a safe

distance on the motorway. But can they improve safety in the next stages of development?

If we want to advance more quickly towards autonomous driving, all innovations in vehicle automation must first be subject to generally binding test procedures, such as those being called for by the German Insurance Association (GDV). What is more, legal, insurance and economic questions still need to be answered. Who will be liable in the event of an accident? How much will third-party insurance cost? Or an MOT test? How expensive will it be to repair an autonomous car? Will such a car still work safely even in ten years' time? Will I be able to sell it easily as a used car? All these issues need to be sorted out today to ensure that we can drive safely – and automatically – into the future.

Best regards,



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Wiesbaden, 24 February 2015

