Slowing Down the Speed Merchants

Dear Reader,

I don't know what your doctor or pharmacist might recommend for ear ache, but the friendly mechanic in the authorized repair shop for a well-known make of car from Wolfsburg in Germany had a solution that was both simple and effective: "Switch it off! People often ask us about that and we'll be happy to do it for you." He was talking about the irritating warning sounds that bombard the ear drums of innocent drivers if they fail to fasten their safety belts and put their foot on the brake pedal before switching on the ignition. Anyone who feels that this infuriating function is taking the control of individual freedoms too far will soon find that things can only get worse. The latest legislation will give car computers new big-brother-style powers. Regulation (EU) 2019/2144 of the European Parliament and of the Council requires vehicles in classes M and N to be fitted with an intelligent speed assistance system from July 6, 2022, for new vehicle types and from July 7, 2024, for all new vehicles.

With the help of digital road maps or road sign recognition functions, the electronic system in the car can identify the current speed limits and step in if the driver fails to adhere to them. As Christiane Köllner explained on www.springerprofessional.de, different levels of escalation will be possible, ranging from discreet messages on the display to major interventions in the driving functions. As legal expert Prof. Eric Hilgendorf explains in his comments on paternalism in road traffic in the interview on page 22, these invasive measures, which will prevent speed merchants from putting their foot to the floor, present problems in legal terms but will be perfectly possible to implement.

This state-of-the-art technology could not only prevent wannabe racing drivers from speeding past kindergartens, which would be a very welcome development, but could also have an impact on the entire traffic system of a city. The reason for this is the cautious driving style that all autonomous means of transport will adopt. This will not only make them the "perfect victims" as Hilgendorf fears, but will also bring the urban traffic flow to a standstill. In the guest comment column on page 76 in this issue, Christian U. Haas, CEO of the PTV Group, describes a scenario drawn up by the company which indicates that the number of vehicle stops and the time wasted in traffic jams will increase significantly. Things don't always get better.

With best regards,

Frank Jung
Editor

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