

Inflated Expectations

Dear Reader,

Expectation management – that is a new buzzword used by Stephan Wolfsried to call for a more realistic assessment of the responsible implementation of highly automated driving functions. At the 1st International ATZ Conference “Driver Assistance Systems – From Assistance to Automated Driving” at the end of April, the Vice President Vehicle Functions and Chassis at Daimler AG dampened the inflated expectations regarding automated driving. “Constraints on automated driving will come not only from legislation but also from our demand for functional safety,” Wolfsried emphatically pointed out.

Until now, it has been legal and security experts who have been putting the brakes on the hyped-up announcements and plans of the automotive industry. At the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas in January, Daimler and Audi were still going for maximum publicity by presenting test drives in fully automatic mode. But now it seems that we can speak of a U-turn in communication.

Automotive experts are hoping that this about-turn will also mean that German OEMs will no longer simply try to emulate the highly symbolic (apparently) autonomous Google Car, but will pursue their own technical developments with the necessary prudence and diligence.

Can one learn from such adjustment phases? For example, the Gartner Hype Cycle shows the five key phases of a technology’s life cycle. According to experts, autonomous driving – which in the public perception seems almost within reach – has actually already passed the “peak of inflated expectations” and is on the downward slope towards the “trough of disillusionment”. The curve will then start to rise again less steeply before settling on the “plateau of productivity”.

But the trough of disillusionment has not yet been reached. What setbacks are still to be expected? It is becoming increasingly apparent that highly automated driving will successively transfer the liability of the consumer to the OEM’s product liability. And car developers will not only be liable; when programming an automated emergency steering assistant, for example, they will also have to decide on matters of life and death for different road users and for the driver. Legal experts are calling it the algorithm of death. Such things tend to dampen enthusiasm.

This disillusionment, however, does not seem to have reached our politicians yet, and engineers are critically monitoring the signals coming from the ministries. The plan to designate a section of the A9 autobahn as a test track for autonomous driving is out of touch with reality, the engineers believe. After all, according to the current state of discussions, drivers are required to remain in control of their vehicles at all times – even after 2030.

Best regards,



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