

Vehicles are getting smarter, but are motorists keeping up?

“Soul mate in vehicle form” just one of many innovations from Swedish researchers at front of road safety pack

Sweden, for many years now, has lead the road safety pack when it comes to transportation system management and passenger safety modifications. So, it makes sense that Swedish research and product development heads have come up with some interesting safety features in the last little while.

Now, keep in mind that I’m not trying to sell cars—Swedish or otherwise. These are “flagship” ideas, not necessarily available on the market yet, but as someone in the road safety profession, I’m excited about these innovations in whatever car they show up in. I’m assuming you are, too. That’s why we’re going to talk about them.

The features we’re going to talk about are, in some cases, designed to protect you in case of a collision. Others are aimed at preventing collisions from occurring. And some are aimed more at your safety and that of your passengers even when you’re not driving. Whew. That’s a lot!



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Anyway, here’s what they’ve come up with so far. First, how about a car that looks deeply into your eyes and adjusts accordingly? Your soul mate in vehicle form, more or less.

Automatic adjustment

Get this: once a driver slips behind the wheel, a sensor automatically hunts for his or her eyeball, and then (based on driver size) automatically adjusts the seat, pedals, steering wheel column and gear shift level into the optimum position for sight, reach and comfort.

Imagine that! No more readjusting the vehicle settings every time my wife messes with the car. Oops. I mean, no more readjusting the vehicle settings every time someone else drives the car. Ahem.

Now imagine power-adjustable brake and gas pedals that move closer to the driver, rather than the old fashioned solution of moving the seat forward, which potentially moves the driver too close to the steering column housing the airbag.

They’ve even developed a personal communicator. Using a remote control keypad (sort of like the keyless entry pad on some models on the market), the driver enters his or her ID, which unlocks the doors. Big deal, right? Well, here’s where it gets rather cool.

The system can be programmed with your personal health information, like allergies or heart problems. So, in the event of a crash, not only does the system automatically call for help, it provides potentially lifesaving medical information to the emergency personnel en route.

So how does it know what shape you’re in? The system contains a heart monitor. The developers say it will soon be able to monitor the driver’s heartbeat

and detect the onset of drowsiness or a heart attack.

Working late? The system will warn you, as you remotely unlock the doors, if someone is already lurking in the car. It will also send out a signal if a child or pet is accidentally left in the car. I’m not sure how this works, but it’s a pretty amazing concept nonetheless.

Criss-cross belt

Not only that, they’re also working on a new seatbelt system: a criss-cross belt (with both left-to-right and right-to-left straps) for passengers, and a centre-buckle belt for drivers. This one looks more like the ones used in racecars, with straps that run over both shoulders and buckle at the lap.

Now, remember, these are all features we can expect to see sometime down the road. It goes to show you that road safety involves three main factors: the road, the driver and the car. Improvements we make at any level, to any of these three factors, will go a long way to getting people from A to B in one piece.

However, all these wonderful safety features (here comes that soap box) won’t be nearly as effective as they could be if we still drive like we’re surrounded by an attitude-generated force field. Remember, safety innovations are not intended to make you feel “safer” in the car while you take the same old risks. People are expected to evolve along with the vehicle they’re riding in.

It’s been said before, but it is worth saying again—you are, and will always be, the most effective safety feature your vehicle has!

So, that’s it for this week. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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