

# Automakers showcase technology to go

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Cars are fast becoming smart phones on wheels. Or at least that's the case with those on display here at the Consumer Electronics Show, where automakers are out in force this week trying to hitch a ride with tablet computers, Internet-connected TVs and robotic floor sweepers.

"They're frantically scrambling for a way to position themselves as being technologically savvy," said Doug Newcomb, senior technology editor for auto information website Edmunds.com. "After all, good luck selling a \$2,000 navigation system to a customer who has good, if not better, free [navigation](#) on their phones."

Some parts of the massive Las Vegas Convention Center seemed more like the Detroit auto show as automakers put their gadget-laden vehicles on display for the more than 100,000 visitors expected for the big tech showcase.

"There is a revolution taking place," said Audi Chairman Rupert Stadler in a CES keynote address Thursday. "Some of the most exciting new consumer electronics aren't the ones in your living rooms or in your offices. They're the ones in your cars. We're redefining what it means to be a really fast computer."

Audi revealed an in-car touch pad that can recognize letters or digits - even Chinese characters - written with a finger so the driver doesn't have to fumble with typing. In the works: a night-vision "assistant" that uses a thermal imaging camera to spot pedestrians and other objects in the dark.

[Hyundai Motor](#) Co. showed off its new Blue Link system, which slows a stolen car down to a crawl and can send text messages to your phone when the vehicle travels outside pre-set boundaries, a feature known as geofencing.

[Ford Motor](#) Co. touted its MyKey technology, expected to roll out later this year, that would allow parents to block explicit satellite radio programming and limit driving speed when teens are behind the wheel.

[Toyota Motor](#) Corp. unveiled its EnTune service, which allows drivers to buy movie tickets on the go, among other functions. For its part, General Motors Co. displayed a new rear-view mirror equipped with its satellite-based OnStar communication system that can be installed on non-GM cars.

It wasn't just automakers. Pioneer Electronics Inc., known for its stereos, showed off technology that can instantly stream YouTube videos to an in-cabin screen. And mobile phone carriers Sprint Nextel Corp. and Verizon Wireless said they were looking at expanding data networks to accommodate ever-more-connected vehicles.

"Consumers are going to expect that whatever they can do at home or on their laptops and smart phones they can also do in their cars," said Rebecca Lindland, an automotive analyst with IHS Global Insight.

It's all part of the growing field of telematics - technologies that help smart phones, tablets and other devices "communicate" with vehicles.

Technologies in development would allow drivers and passengers to monitor their home security cameras, get instant traffic updates from other connected drivers and play video games with opponents around the world - all on the move.

But as automakers pack cars with more computerized brains and link them to sprawling data networks, some worry that the same kind of malware and hijinks that plague other electronics could make the vehicles unsafe.

Hackers could access private information stored on digital dashboards or take control of a car from afar, said Thilo Koslowski, an auto analyst with technology research firm Gartner Inc. The lack of strong data firewalls in cars "could be an accident waiting to happen."

And even if secure, the new smorgasbord of in-car options - for example, Facebook updates recited aloud - could cause information overload for consumers and distracted driving, Koslowski said.

This week, Consumer Reports magazine criticized the MyFord/MyLincoln technology from Ford, which includes an in-dash touch screen that can control the car's cabin temperature, among others. The system, the magazine reviewers said, was "complex and buggy" and a "complicated distraction while driving" that first-time users might find "impossible to comprehend."

Gadgets for distracted driving have become a market of their own. Companies have flooded CES with technologies that claim to curb unsafe driving habits.

The Anti-Sleep Pilot, which uses simple touch tests to measure alertness, aims to calculate a driver's fatigue level based on factors such as alcohol intake and length of the work day. The Mobileye C2-270 uses a sensor mounted on the windshield to set off a buzzer when the vehicle nears other cars, motorcycles or pedestrians.

Taser International Inc. showed off its Protector software, which uses a Bluetooth signal to lock phones' texting, e-mailing and Web-surfing

capabilities when inside a moving car. Other systems, such as PhoneGuard, activate when the vehicle exceeds a certain speed.

ZoomSafer's new FleetSafer Vision uses a special algorithm to collect information from service providers such as AT&T and vehicles' telematics systems to create a report about on-the-go phone use by corporate drivers.

Insurance companies such as Allstate, Progressive and State Farm have recently announced gadgets that can track mileage and behind-the-wheel habits, promising better rates for the safest and most efficient drivers.

And there's more innovation on the way.

OnStar has partnered with Verizon on a prototype system that would run on the high-speed 4G wireless network. It would feature cameras and sensors inside and all around the vehicle that can quickly record an accident. Collisions, such as parking lot fender-benders, could trigger the system to send an e-mail with an attached video clip to the vehicle's owner.

Motorists can also use voice commands to call up YouTube, Twitter, Skype and other sites on an in-vehicle display. The system could also link up to a home-monitoring system to control the thermostat and lights.

Another prototype technology being developed with help from Toyota, Atlantic Records and other companies would allow passengers watching on-demand video in the car to pause it and then finish it at home.

"Adding all these accessories can make it tough to understand how this all works," said Derek Kuhn, vice president of sales and marketing for QNX Software Systems Co., which worked on a system for BMW that can read e-mails and text messages aloud to drivers. "You want to make

this so simple that the driver doesn't have to think about what they're doing."

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