

Driven to distraction: Carmakers mull gadget risks

November 20 2013, by Michael Thurston



People crowd around a Nissan Rogue loaded with Airbiquity technology on November 19, 2013 in Los Angeles, where the LA Auto Show opened for a media preview three days before opening to the public

Talking on the phone while driving is illegal in a growing number of countries, but with the explosion of in-car technologies the potential for drivers being distracted is greater than ever.

The dangers of gadget distraction were highlighted Tuesday in Los

Angeles, where the LA Auto Show devoted a whole day to the opportunities in the so-called Connected Car, as well as the risks.

Technologies which make driving safer—from anti-collision systems to devices which prod you awake if you drift off—have grown to become increasingly standard on new cars.

But at the same time the modern motorist can choose from ever more sophisticated entertainment systems, while social networking and other hi-tech communications make talking or texting on the phone seem old hat.

"Driver distraction is number one for us," said Phil Abram, Chief Infotainment Officer for General Motors (GM), told a panel debate on the first preview day of the LA Auto Show.

"It's .. important to get that smartphone out of the hands, and safely in the center console," he added at the show, which opens its doors to the public on Friday and lasts through December 1.

Increasingly powerful smartphones can nowadays be connected straight into in-car systems, which often have [flat panel displays](#) able to stream music, video and more at the touch of a button, or screen.

German carmaker Audi presented what it called the "connected car of the future" at the LA show Tuesday, touting the new A3 sedan as the first to provide 4G LTE in the vehicle itself.



Pioneer's appRadio3 which can replace a car stereo is displayed on November 19, 2013 at the Los Angeles Auto Show

But a key problem for auto manufacturers stems from the sheer variety of phones, tablets and operating systems, which often fail to work seamlessly with the car itself, according to a study cited at the LA show.

Frustrated motorists are left grappling with infotainment systems that freeze, Bluetooth phones or devices which do not talk to each other, or other glitches which require them to stab at buttons.

"The car manufacturers are really struggling with this," Peter Skillman of Nokia's Here mapping unit told the LA Times, which said electronics problems now outweigh mechanical issues as motorists' top complaint in recent studies.

The sheer proliferation of devices also presents a problem for regulators. Whereas it was relatively easy to ban talking and texting while driving, it

is difficult to draw the line with so many technologies.

"We're not close to a standard on this," said Kevin Vincent, chief counsel for America's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), adding that it is a long way from coming up with new laws.

"We're making recommendations, but they're voluntary. There are a lot of questions to be answered. It's a very complex question," he said.

Mitch Bainwol, head of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, defended car makers, and put the blame squarely on phones and how they are used.



A display of tech apps available for modern cars are displayed on November 19, 2013 in Los Angeles

"The factor that's causing death on the highways is the device," he said, while acknowledging the tough task regulators face. "The pace of technology is faster than regulators can cope with."

Ford vice president Jim Farley highlighted the importance of in-car technology in his opening keynote speech to the LA Auto Show.

"We have literally turned the car into a platform for app developers, who work with us to add value through new features delivered at the speed consumers expect," he said.

A new Nielsen study, the key findings of which were presented at the show, showed that people are already shopping from their cars, with Amazon.com the fourth most browsed site.

"It's early days to be sure, but you can see that some consumers are already turning the car into a ... shopping center on wheels," said an executive from the audience ratings service.

© 2013 AFP

Citation: Driven to distraction: Carmakers mull gadget risks (2013, November 20) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-11-driven-distraction-carmakers-mull-gadget.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.