

Google self-driving car prototype ready to try road

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The finalized prototype of Google self-driving car. Credit: Google

Google on Monday announced that the first completed prototype of its self-driving car is ready to be road tested.

"We're going to be spending the holidays zipping around our test track, and we hope to see you on the streets of Northern California in the new year," the Internet titan's autonomous car team said in a post at Google+

social network.

The prototype is a manifestation of plans that California-based Google revealed in May to build its own autonomous car minus typical features such as steering wheels.

"They won't have a steering wheel, accelerator pedal, or brake pedal... because they don't need them. Our software and sensors do all the work," Google's Chris Urmson said in a blog post in May.

Technical specifics about the prototype were not disclosed on Monday.

For Google, the car marks a shift away from adapting vehicles made by others in its quest to pioneer individual transport that needs only a stop-and-go function.

Google said early this year that the top speed of the battery-powered prototypes will be 25 miles (40 kilometers) per hour and that they would be designed for utility, not luxury.

The blog post on Monday showed a white, rounded bug-looking vehicle.

"We've been working on different prototypes-of-prototypes, each designed to test different systems of a self-driving car—for example, the typical car parts like steering and braking, as well as the self-driving parts like the computer and sensors," Google said.



A Google self-driving car is seen in Mountain View, California, on May 13, 2014

"We've now put all those systems together in this fully functional vehicle-our first complete prototype for fully autonomous driving."

Several automakers have been working on autonomous or semi-autonomous features for cars, such as self-parking, but no fully autonomous car has come to market.

"Self-driving cars, if widely adopted, stand to be as transformative to consumer life as the smartphone," said Mike Hudson, who tracks the automotive industry for eMarketer.

Matt Inman, the former computer programmer behind popular

technology-focused humor website The Oatmeal, depicted Google's car as a hyper-cautious marshmallow in a playful post about a test ride.

"I'm ready for our army of Skynet Marshmallow Bumper Bots," the post at theoatmeal.com concluded.

"I'm ready for the future. I'm ready for the marshmallows."

More information: plus.google.com/+GoogleSelfDrivingCars/posts/9WBWP2E4GDu

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