

Do sports cars have a future in a driverless world?

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Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini, Bugatti. The prestigious names embody performance and luxury across the automotive world.

But with the advent of soulless [self-driving cars](#), are they fated to be locked away in the stables like the horses they replaced a century ago?

Not so fast, responds Ferrari. The Italian race car legend, its iconic prancing horse logo idolized by drivers everywhere, is still putting out high-performance cars that need real people at the wheel.

It just introduced its newest supercar, the Sergio, and is working on a car more powerful than any it ever produced, the FXX K. An electric motor will help boost the 860 horsepower of the V12 engine to an astounding 1,050 horses.

Maserati, like Ferrari part of the Fiat Chrysler stable, is promising a new Alfieri coupe in 2016, and the next version of the GranTurismo will be unveiled at the end of 2017.

But will the Italian thoroughbreds and their German counterparts be able to resist the looming turn of the industry toward cars that don't need drivers at all?

'Change inevitable'

Karl Brauer, an industry analyst at Kelley Blue Book, says the industry march away from humans controlling cars and toward more technology will not stop.

"It is inevitable," he told AFP.

That will leave performance sports cars and supercars the province of a small group of wealthy motor speed fans and hobbyists dedicated to having their own hands in control, he said.

Increasingly, they will be confined to driving on tracks and private roads as [autonomous vehicles](#) take off with the broader public.

Some of those who buy performance sports cars for social status—the majority of buyers—could even turn away from them for other ostentatious signs of success, said Martin Zimmerman, a professor at the University of Michigan and a former economist at Ford.

But there will always be fans who value traditionally driven sports cars, Zimmerman said.

"I suspect that there will be always a demand for sitting in a nice looking [sports car](#) and being able to control it yourself."

Eventually, the sports car could become confined to a small niche of passionate fans, revving their engines and testing their speed on dedicated circuits.

It is up to the top automakers around the world together with tech leaders to produce autonomous, [driverless cars](#) for public use, and the day they enter general use is coming soon.

Self-driving cars could make highways safer by eliminating the main

cause of road accidents, driver error.

The first driverless cars could hit the market in 2018, according to manufacturers, though the legal and ethical questions are many—for instance, who is to blame if there is an accident?

Road tests of self-driving cars are already well advanced—especially of the Google Car, the pioneer in the market. It has traveled hundreds of thousands of miles on California roads without accident, Google says.

The war on speeding in developed countries; changes in consumer interests, with a new generation more focused on electronic gadgets; and more eco-friendly thinking also pose obstacles for performance sports car fans.

Seeking a balance

One course for the future, according to analysts, will be to achieve a balance between technologies that make the vehicles safer and the sensations of high speed and high performance on the road that fans crave.

"There will be a demand for sports cars that allow individuals to control and drive the vehicle, but the technology that's being developed around these autonomous vehicles will actually make it more fun and safer for individuals to drive these vehicles," said Joe Vitale, an industry specialist at consultant Deloitte.

Makers of top-end cars in the sports and luxury segments have to keep coming up with new things, and adopt the most advanced technologies, to keep attracting buyers, said Alan Baum, head of the consultant Baum and Associates.

"When that product starts to age, then the consumer starts to go to the next new thing," he said.

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