

Popular 'dashcams' catch everything from scammers to plane crashes

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This screen grab taken from video provided courtesy of TVBS Taiwan on February 4, 2015 shows a TransAsia ATR 72-600 turboprop plane clipping an elevated motorway before crashing into the Keelung river

The terrifying footage of a plane clipping a bridge in Taiwan and crashing into a river this week was a reminder that "dashcams" have become an increasingly standard piece of kit in cars around the world.

The TransAsia crash, which killed at least 31 people on Wednesday, was filmed by at least two cars each carrying a dashboard camera.

But it was not a complete coincidence, since dashcams have become increasingly popular in Taiwan to guard against disputes after an accident.

It's not the first time a rare event has been captured in this way.

In February 2013, a car-camera caught a meteorite crashing to Earth in Chelyabinsk, Russia, injuring more than 1,000 people.

Last summer, a dashcam filmed a missile landing on a motorway just a few metres ahead of a speeding car in eastern Ukraine.

Dashcams have become particularly popular in Russia to prevent scammers who throw themselves into the windscreens of slow-moving cars in a bid to claim insurance money.

The trend has spawned several amusing videos of people jumping on to the bonnets of stationary vehicles and pretending to be hurt.

The largest taxi firm in Singapore has installed cameras in all 16,600 of its vehicles to provide evidence after an accident, but also to encourage prudence from their drivers.

Already, insurance policies have appeared that offer lower rates to people with dashcams.

The habit has started to catch on in Europe. Sales were estimated to have reached 370,000 in France by early 2014 according to magazine *UFC-Que Choisir*.

A typical camera costs around 200 euros (\$230) and records 10 minutes at a time. Drivers can save a recording manually, or footage is stored automatically in the event of a violent shock.

"We are seeing a major shift, with people equipping themselves more and more with cameras in their cars, first of all for use after accidents, but also in case of a hit-and-run," said a spokesman for France's Allianz and Amaguiz insurance firm, which has tied up with dashcam manufacturer Coyote.

He added that the airplane crash in Taiwan would probably be filed under "additional and unexpected uses".

Pierre Chasseray, head of a French drivers' association called 40 Millions d'Automobilistes, said dashcams should become standard.

"It's an extremely positive development in terms of road safety and it's good in terms of ensuring drivers act responsibly," he said.

"The camera never lies."

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