Apple now has more self-driving car permits in California than Waymo and Tesla

May 16 2018, by Seung Lee, The Mercury News

Just last year, Apple was in the backseat of an increasingly crowded competition for self-driving cars with Google-owned Waymo, Tesla and Uber vying for an edge.

Apple had just three permits from the California Department of Motor Vehicles to operate self-driving cars.

But now, the Cupertino tech giant is reaping the fruits of its ramped-up investment in the new technology, beating out Tesla and Waymo for the second-most self-driving car permits with the DMV, according to a report from the Apple-focused tech blog Mac Reports.

Apple has 55 permits that allow it to test self-driving cars on California roads, finishing second behind General Motors' Cruise division, which has 104 permits.

Apple rapidly grew out its fleet from three in April 2017. In January, Apple increased its self-driving car fleet ninefold to 27 and to 45 by April this year. In May, Apple got permits for 10 more self-driving vehicles, according to Mac Reports.

The self-driving car permits issued by California's DMV require a safety driver to be on board to grab the wheel at any time.

But driverless car permits may soon be issued by the DMV; after the DMV's Office of Administrative Law approved the driverless testing

regulations in February, the DMV was able to approve applications for driverless car permits starting on April 2.

So far, Apple has not applied for a driverless car permit, according to Mac Reports.

Apple did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Apple has 83 drivers under its permits, which is fewer than General Motors, Waymo and Tesla. Waymo had the largest gulf between its self-driving car permits and the number of drivers at 51 vehicles and 338 drivers. Tesla had slightly more drivers than Apple at 92, but fewer vehicles at 39.

In total, there are 53 permit holders for self-driving vehicles in the state of California. Among the 53 companies, which include other mainstream carmakers such as Nissan, Toyota, Ford and Subaru, there are a total of 409 self-driving cars and 1,573 drivers.

Apple had a tortuous path with the self-driving car technology. After starting with a secret operation to build a self-driving car codenamed Project Titan in 2014, the project fell apart in two years.

In April 2017, Apple received its first official permit from the California DMV to operate self-driving test cars on its roads. In June that year, Apple CEO Tim Cook said Apple was working on developing the autonomous-driving software, which will be added to existing car models rather than building a self-driving car from scratch.

In October, one of Apple's self-driving car systems—a crown-like structure with sensors and radars attached to the roof of a white Lexus—was videotaped in the South Bay and shared on social media.

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