

Will self-driving cars save us all?

Mark Pavilons



If you look really closely at our habits in the "first world," - you'll undoubtedly uncover some nasty bits, sort of like the mucky stuff under rocks that bugs like so much.

We are the authors of our own story. And the current edition of humankind contains all the aspects of a great story ? greed, hubris, irony, grief, sadness, regret

We have had a love affair with the automobile for more than 100 years. In our neck of the woods, we still rely on this mode of transportation and most households have two or more of these in the driveway.

To feed these beasts, we need fuel stations.

The number of gas stations in Canada rose to 12,000 in 2016, the highest ever. Just glancing around in the GTA, one can't help but notice there's almost one station at every major intersection and around every corner. It seems the oil barons want to make filling up so convenient, that if we miss one station, there's a dozen more up the road.

Availability is one thing. Cost is another.

Given the propensity of fuel stations, one would think there are more cars on the road than ever before.

There were 1.95 million light vehicles sold in Canada in 2016, up 2.7% over 2015. The top sellers were Ford, FCA and GM, with Toyota in fourth.

Our American neighbours purchased 17.55 million cars in 2016 ? a new record.

In 2015, a total of 33 million vehicles were registered in Canada, more than our country's population.

But, Ford recently announced it's shaving 10 per cent of its salaried workforce, to save money. Wait, the demand is steady, there's no shortage of cars on the road and yet business success comes at the cost of workers' livelihood?

As my 16-year-old son begins driving, he's just getting to understand the rules of the road and perhaps some of the joy of being behind the wheel.

He's developed quite an interest in the muscle cars of the 1960s and '70s and would love to get his hands on a Dodge Charger or Challenger.

I had the pleasure of driving my late uncle's 1973 Charger SE with a 318 V8. The nose on that car was a block long. I remember him telling us he accidentally veered off the road, hit a telephone pole and split it in half, and still drove home. That's good, old Canadian muscle!

I share Liam's penchant for vintage rides, but these have become quite pricey in recent years. I don't expect to see one of these in my driveway anytime soon.

Those old V8s definitely suck up the juice, so those 12,000 gas stations sure come in handy.

While the auto giants are still churning out powerhouses, the move is towards hybrid and fully electric vehicles. We will see more of these in the years to come.

All of the auto-makers are playing around with self-driving technology, and it will be here before you can say double

Holley-pumper!

Will these vehicles save us from our endless appetite on fossil fuels? Will gas stations one day disappear from the landscape? Will they ever be completely safe and reliable?

It's estimated that by 2030, self-driving cars and trucks (autonomous vehicles) could account for as much as 60 per cent of North American auto sales.

That's incredible.

Those of us who are "old school," may be a bit skeptical about autonomous vehicles. At this point, I still have trouble thinking about jumping into my car, reclining the seat, telling the computer my destination, and taking a cat nap as we head into the office.

According to various agencies like the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and MTO, 90 per cent of all accidents can be blamed on human error. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reported that nearly 80 per cent of drivers expressed anger, aggression, or road rage behind the wheel at least once in the past year.

We are all too familiar with alcohol-related fatalities and the constant problem we're having in the GTA and here in York Region. Some are still not getting the message.

Between that, distracted driving, and stupidity, you can chalk down the bulk of accidents to human frailties. If you have been in an accident caused by someone who was distracted at the wheel, you must contact a [car accident lawyer](#) to hear your case to see what the potential outcome is.

The argument is if you remove human error from driving, you will save a significant number of lives and prevent injuries.

Our current vehicles come with the latest in safety features, including multiple airbags, sensors that can help avoid a collision, and automatic distress calls. Our cars today already have computer brains. However, even with these safety features, accidents do happen. Thankfully though, those injured can use a [Deer Park injury attorney](#), or whatever other attorneys are near to them, to recoup some of the financial loss that may come from an accident. Totally a car, having medical expenses, and having time off work can cause serious financial implications and it's good to have a lawyer who can handle those issues and come to a settlement between injured parties.

But what if we would implement newer technology that could almost eradicate collisions altogether. The next evolution of self-driving cars seems natural.

One of the leaders is Tesla, and there are more and more appearing on our roads. On top of that, the company is seeing more investors searching how to buy tesla stock and by doing this, they're showing they believe in the company who only strengthens it further. I understand the appeal -- They're quite spiffy machines, but they come with an even spiffier price tag.

Unfortunately, Tesla suffered a setback last May when a Florida man died while driving on "autopilot."

While tragic, data indicates that semi-autonomous vehicles crash significantly less often than cars driven by humans.

This past January, Elon Musk said that a software update featuring "Shadow mode" was being put into Teslas with HW2 Autopilot capabilities. It's sort of teaching AI to drive as it watches and learns from the human driver.

As auto giants and tech partners scramble to hasten this evolution, we're entering a new international "space race" of sorts.

Technology will continue to improve, and so will such autotomous systems.

It's the human bugs we'll have to work out, and issues with regulations, insurance, etc.

Just as some people hate flying, there will be many who will shy away from letting the robot do the driving.

The way things are going, I think we'll see such vehicles before 2030. My son will be 29. Hopefully he'll be squealing the tires of his classic muscle car, while I relax in my silent cruiser, listening to music and watching TV!