

Cars of the future: safer, cleaner, more comfortable

Within a decade, most new cars will be equipped with clean-drive technology and a host of easy to serve technical gadgets that will make driving much more comfortable and safer than today.

Engineers are currently working on several technologies that were still fiction in the 1980s American television series 'Knight Rider' in which David Hasselhoff is partnered by an autonomous car called KITT with artificial intelligence.

Like KITT, the car of the future recognises its owner with a mini iris-recognition camera.

The front-mounted 'scan bar' in KITT is similar to the mini cameras currently being tested that perceive the car surroundings, informing the driver of possible danger zones. It even brakes automatically if the driver does not react.

Some of the gadgets such as night vision and brake-assist are already available in premium cars such as the new BMW 7-Series but will become the norm in a few years time.

Once the driver sits into the car, the vehicle automatically adjusts the seat and steering wheel settings to the ideal position. The car entertainment system meanwhile plays his/her favourite music while the navigation system begins to choose the best route.

Like KITT, the car could theoretically drive itself, drop its driver outside the office and choose the next available parking space.

Cars will be in contact with other cars and traffic information centres picking up information on accidents, traffic jams or parking areas.

Many of the functions presently in use have complicated menu programmes, switches or buttons. In future you will be able to speak to your car like Hasselhoff to KITT, telling it what to do.

German automaker Volkswagen's head of future research and trend transfer, Wolfgang Mueller-Pietralla, says that the car of the future will be a 'lot more fun, evolving from purely a vehicle to a living space' where we can do most of the things we do at home or in the office like phoning, shopping, watching television or surfing the internet.

Car assistance systems will eliminate most of the risks we have on the road today. Camera-assisted fatigue recognition systems tell the driver when to rest.

The mini cameras with night vision monitor the vehicle surroundings by 180 degrees, picking up possible dangers from any angle, informing the vehicle information system on what action to take.

The car will not be able to fly or jump over objects with rocket boosters, but a lot of the fiction we saw in 'Knight Rider' will have merged into everyday reality.

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