

Google pilots self-driving car around Lake Tahoe

By Sharon Gaudin, Computerworld

Picture sitting in your car, maneuvering through busy downtown traffic while talking on your phone or sending a few texts.

This isn't a scene of illegal texting or phone use. Why not? Because the car in this scenario is driving itself, leaving the passengers inside free to use their mobile phones. (In Google's ideal scenario, you'd be talking on an Android phone.)

This is Google's image of the future. The company known best for its search engine announced this past weekend that its engineers are working on developing technology for cars that can drive themselves. Autonomous cars may be a bit far afield from Google's normal work in search, browsers, operating systems and maps, but the company is looking to head down a new road.

"Our automated cars, manned by trained operators, just drove from our Mountain View campus to our Santa Monica office and on to Hollywood Boulevard," wrote Sebastian Thrun, a distinguished software engineer at Google, in a Saturday blog post. "They've driven down Lombard Street, crossed the Golden Gate bridge, navigated the Pacific Coast Highway, and even made it all the way around Lake Tahoe. All in all, our self-driving cars have logged over 140,000 miles. We think this is a first in robotics research."

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