

Driverless cars struggle in the snow

By Keith Naughton, BloombergNews

In Jokkmokk, a tiny hamlet just north of the Arctic Circle in Sweden, where temperatures can dip to 50 below, Volvo Cars' self-driving XC90 sport-utility vehicle met its match: frozen flakes that caked on radar sensors essential to reading the road. Suddenly, the SUV was blind.

"It's really difficult, especially when you have the snow smoke from the car in front," said Marcus Rothoff, director of Volvo's autonomous-driving program. "A bit of ice, you can manage. But when it starts building up, you just lose functionality."

After moving the sensors around to various spots on the front, Volvo engineers finally found a solution. Next year, when Swedish drivers take their hands off the wheel of leased XC90s in the world's first public test of autonomous technology, the radar will be nestled behind the windshield, where wipers can clear the ice and snow.

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