

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/its-all-riding-on-industry/>

Stanford mechanical engineering Professor Chris Gerdes addresses the commonly held fears around autonomous vehicles. Most of it isn't rooted in personal experience, and once people are allowed to ride in them, Gerdes says public perception will start to turn if that experience is pleasant. So it's incumbent on the first companies that deploy driverless cars en masse to get everything right, according to Gerdes.



Transcript

- I think it's very interesting that a lot of times there are interviews with people about how do you feel about automated vehicles, and people will report that 70 something percent of people have this concern about automated vehicles.. But what is their basis of reference? What do they know about automated vehicles? What have they learned? It's something that they've read.. It's something that they've seen.. People tend to be hesitant at first.. We've seen this with our cars.. People often are unwilling to get in.. At first, they're a little bit hesitant.. And then even with the race cars, after a couple laps on the track, people are like relaxing, going oh, yeah, car's got it.. You do know this was programmed by grad students and a professor.. (audience member laughs) The fact that you've actually safely made it around the track twice doesn't really imply that you're gonna continue to make it around this track safely..

But people's fears go away super quickly.. So I think that's also irrational, but helpful in terms of people wanting to have automated vehicles out there.. So what I really think is gonna be key, and one of the messages that I've been giving to manufacturers, is that the very first pilot deployments, the very first vehicles that are carrying people around are gonna set people's expectations for this technology.. And so I think companies should be really smart to think about what is it that they're doing with these initial deployments, who are they moving? Because if there are, and there will be, accidents with automated vehicles, I think people will look at that and say, well, do I see this as something which is only available to a small percentage of the population? Or do I see this as a technology which maybe not today, but in the next few years will be available to me, or will be helping my aging parents move around? And that sort of connection will be really important, I think, in building public support.. So I think it's not a question of going out to the public and trying to convince people that these cars are safe and that they should like them.. I think it's incumbent upon the manufacturers to produce something which is safe, which interacts with the public in a good way, and in fact, is available to a large segment, if not all of our population.. And I think if they do that, then the public perception issue will be much less than people commonly think...