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Motorists sceptical driverless cars will be commonplace in 20 years' time

Motorists have doubts about whether driverless car technology is likely to become commonplace in 20 years' time, and many would rather see the Government focusing more time and effort on sorting out the country's roads in preparation for them.

The Government has allocated £69m to developing connected and autonomous vehicles as it is keen to give the UK the best chance of being at the forefront of this technology race.

Research conducted with 2,194 members of the RAC Opinion Panel shows that only 5% of motorists think the Government should be prioritising financial support for the development of driverless vehicle technology in the current economic climate, though a further 17% support investment in this area but don't see it as an immediate priority.

Four in 10 (39%) would prefer to see the funds redirected to improving the existing road infrastructure and a further quarter (27%) claim the money would be better spent on what they regard as more pressing needs such as health and education.

Motorists are sceptical about whether the technology will become a reality with four in 10 (40%) believing the chances of there being one million driverless vehicles on the UK's roads by 2037 to be 'a bit pie in the sky' and that it will actually take far longer for that number of driverless cars to appear on the UK's roads.

Just under a third (31%) think there is an outside chance the numbers could reach that level in 20 years whereas a cynical 17% believe they won't live

long enough to see one million driverless cars on the UK's roads. Only one in 10 (12%), however, are optimistic that it will happen.

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The biggest concern among motorists about driverless cars is unequivocally the reliability of the software controlling the vehicle with almost half (46%) of those surveyed by the RAC identifying this as their top concern. For more than a quarter (27%), the thought of losing personal control over their vehicles was top of the list, and a further 10% ranked the fear of cyber-attacks leading to remote theft or corruption of data as their number-one concern.

There was an expectation from around a third (31%) of respondents that the biggest benefit of autonomous vehicles would come from making journeys safer by eradicating driver error. The next two on the ranking list of predicted greatest positives – both on 16% – were the environment benefits brought about by reducing emissions and optimising fuel economy, and a reduction in stress and incidents of driver conflict such as road rage.

There was also broad agreement about the journey towards driverless vehicles being a gradual one – ‘evolution rather than revolution’. Two in five motorists (39%) believe manufacturers will progressively introduce more and more semi-autonomous features over time so there will not be a step change in safety benefits when full autonomy is finally achieved.

RAC chief engineer David Bizley said: “Very understandably motorists have a

range of questions and concerns about driverless cars. There is clearly some widespread scepticism about the technology becoming prevalent and some concerns over reliability which are no doubt based on motorists' everyday experiences of computers and the lack of resilience of the software they use.

“Finding out that around half of motorists would rather see the money the Government has allocated to encourage the development of driverless cars used to improve the condition of the roads they drive on is perhaps not a great surprise. But the £69 million allocated for driverless car support is very small when compared to the funding made available annually for the maintenance of both the strategic and local road networks.”

Despite a degree of scepticism about fully autonomous vehicles, motorists remain enthusiastic about the driver assistance technologies that are available today. Nearly half (45%) of drivers surveyed said they were attracted by adaptive cruise control – technology that automatically brakes and accelerates the vehicle when trying to maintain a pre-set cruising speed to take account of other traffic slowing or speeding up. More than a third (36%) liked self-parking systems that carry out manoeuvres such as parallel parking autonomously and 34% were attracted by automatic emergency braking, a feature that many road safety campaigners, including the RAC, would like to see as standard on all new vehicles.

To date the Government has launched a £30 million Intelligent Mobility Fund for research and development of innovative connected and autonomous vehicle technologies. It also awarded £20 million to a number of projects to ensure the UK is able to take advantage of the latest technological developments in driverless cars research. In addition, a £19 million fund was ring-fenced to pave the way for driverless car projects in Greenwich, Bristol, Milton Keynes and Coventry. Additionally, the Government outlined proposals in the recent Queen's Speech on autonomous vehicle technology and the associated questions regarding liability.

Notes to Editors

About the RAC

First formed in 1897 the RAC has been looking after the needs of its members

and championing the interests of motorists for 120 years.

Today it has more than eight million members and is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists. Whether it's roadside assistance, insurance, buying a used car, vehicle inspections and checks, legal services or up-to-the-minute traffic and travel information – the RAC offers a solution for all motoring needs. The RAC is committed to making motoring easier, safer, more affordable and more enjoyable for drivers and road users.

The RAC is the motorist's champion and campaigns to support the interests of its members and UK motorists at a national level. This includes voicing concerns about the increasing cost of motoring, particularly the price of fuel and the high level of tax levied on it, advancing levels of road safety, and supporting the needs of all drivers, from young to old.

The RAC's annual [Report on Motoring](#) – first published in 1989 – provides a clear insight into the concerns and issues facing today's motorists.

For the very latest news on UK fuel prices, check [RAC Fuel Watch](#) or follow [#racfuelwatch on Twitter](#). RAC Fuel Watch is a comprehensive guide to the latest UK unleaded petrol and diesel prices – both at the wholesale level and at the pump. RAC Fuel Watch analyses how prices changed through the previous month and compares the most recent prices with those from three, six and 12 months before.

Key facts:

- RAC patrols fix four out of five vehicles at the roadside and on average within 30 minutes
- RAC vans carry more than 500 parts and tools to get members' vehicles going again
- 92% of members would recommend RAC Rescue to their friends and family

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