

## **Open letter to Google's car makers**

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**By Khairul Khalid**

Google's plans for a revolutionary self-driving car – without drivers, steering wheels, pedals, brakes – catches the imagination. Tiger reckons it would be perfect for Malaysian motorists, with some conditions of course.

Dear Google,

I read with keen interest your next special project – a great big leap into the automotive industry, a self-driving car no less!

Tiger is a big tech fan. Google's advances in the technological world are legendary. What on Google earth would we do without the mighty Google search, the ubiquitous Gmail and Android-powered mobile phones?

Of course, the automotive business is a different kettle of fish and chips altogether but I think that Google's ambitious idea of a self-driving car will, sooner or later, strike a chord with auto enthusiasts.

I hear that you are also looking for locations for pilot programmes of the highly anticipated car. Let me tell you, Malaysia would be the perfect market to launch Google's future automotive masterpiece. But before that, let me shed some light on the some of the country's automotive quirks and habits.

Google's plan for a driverless vehicle without steering wheels, accelerator or brake pedals is certainly laudable but not entirely unique. Sorry to burst your bubble, but drivers in our capital of Kuala Lumpur have long embraced the concept. Take a quick drive around the city and you will see what I mean. The steering wheel is already quite redundant.

Most local drivers spend much of their time (and hands) glued to their mobile phones making calls and texting without even bothering to look up at oncoming traffic. Discarding the steering wheel seems like the next logical progression, That would free up our drivers from petty distractions such as evading jaywalkers and running past red lights.

Tiger also reads that the Google car will be equipped with intelligent software and sensors to navigate different types of roads and terrain. Surely Google's mastery of digital 3D mapping will produce a car that could automatically weave around any streets in the world effortlessly.

However, I would urge Google to pre-install its car with the latest high-tech gizmos in GPS (Global Pothole System). You see, the streets of Kuala Lumpur are justifiably infamous for its countless "now-you-see-it, now-you-hit-it" potholes. As the nation has developed in leaps and bounds, so have the potholes concomitantly. With the massive construction around the city for the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit), we are now seeing more gigantic sinkholes. The price of progress, you might say.

Tiger would also recommend Google's R&D (research & development) team to integrate top-notch marine and aviation technology into the driverless car.

Why marine? Kuala Lumpur is notorious for its torrential rain and flash floods. I would advise Google to ditch the airbags and furnish the Google car with safety features such as life rafts, life jackets, paddles and inflatables instead. That would definitely be more functional and useful.

Why aviation? Our city is also internationally recognised as breeding ground for pesky flying hazards on the roads, better known as "Mat Rempits". These are usually men who treat their motorcycles like mini Cessnas, whizzing in and out of traffic while acting out their childhood Superman fantasies. Google's car will need some kind of early-detection radars or transponders to avoid running these nutty motorists over.

Another thing for Google to ponder is the fact that Malaysia is a toll-obsessed nation. New toll booths and gantries pop up out of nowhere and at alarming rates. That might mess up even Google's most complex algorithms.

Rumour has it that pretty soon drivers will be tolled before they even step into their cars. Most of Kuala Lumpur's major roads and highways are operated by private concessionaires with snooty names such as "Duke" or "Silk", perhaps alluding to the immeasurable wealth that they have amassed at the expense of taxpayers.

Tiger also hears that Google is looking at joint partnerships with existing car manufacturers.

Look no further than our beloved car manufacturer Proton. Well, let's rephrase that a little. If it's not beloved by the consumers and buying public, Proton most certainly gets a lot of love (and protection) by the federal government. Even our venerable former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad is making a comeback at Proton after being appointed its chairman recently at the ripe old age of 89.

Some say Mahathir is doing it for pride and a sense of unfinished business, although most analysts would beg to differ and say that Proton is indeed finished as a business.

Tiger feels that Google's driverless car is destined for wild success, especially in Malaysia where nobody seems to be behind the wheel nowadays.

I'm sure we will be exchanging notes again soon. All the best. Don't be evil.

Yours truly,

GRRRRR!

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