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Why won't my car shut up and drive?



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The love affair with your car is being sorely tested by technology overload.

By Beth Teitell | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 17, 2016

Call me crazy, but we just bought a new car, and really, the only thing I want to do in it is drive. As in travel from Point A to Point B.

But apparently before I get started with old-fashioned matters like basic transportation, I have to study a 716-page owner's manual (its actual length), and watch tutorials on complicated matters like turning on the radio and opening the rear hatch, and download an app rumored to contain information that couldn't fit in the manual or the tutorials.



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I feel cranky for saying this, but I don't want to make a dinner reservation from my dashboard. I don't want to become a person who considers it normal to bark out orders to a voice-recognition system as I'm driving 65 miles an hour — “Call Area Four pizza!” — and then becomes impatient when I'm misunderstood. “I said, CALL AREA FOUR PIZZA YOU IDIOT.”

But who's the idiot? At the rate technology is moving, how long until my smart car starts gossiping with my smart scale and smart refrigerator?

Car: I may be speaking out of school here, but she eats out a lot. A. Lot.

Refrigerator: Organic raspberries and Japanese eggplants are rotting in my bins. Scale: I haven't seen her in months.

Five imagined car-safety features that might --might - - help Boston's infamous drivers

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Bostonians need cars that automatically flip the
bird.

The car's dashboard has so many buttons that if I didn't know better, I'd think I was about to fly an airplane. The buttons have little pictures on them, but since I don't speak carmoji, and won't be able to memorize all their little functions, I'll inevitably need to swerve off the road one day to consult the manual, only to learn the cryptic picture in question lets me know the car is in swerve-avoidance mode.

"I'm not sure what the one that looks like a sneezing nose is for," my husband said as we spent Saturday getting to know by far the most complicated member of the family.

RMV, if you're reading this: It may be time to update the driver's ed curriculum. Knowing who has right of way in a rotary, or the meaning of a double solid white line, are so yesterday. Today's drivers need to learn about syncing their phone's Bluetooth with the car's Bluetooth, and inputting "favorite" phone contacts.

If you haven't shopped for a new car recently you may not realize how complex these machines have become, but there's now an actual educational website called ["MyCarDoesWhat.org."](http://MyCarDoesWhat.org)

When I first heard about it, I thought it could help me figure out how to respond to a friend's status update on Facebook — LOL! — while navigating Seaport traffic, but the site confines its mission to safety-related technology.

Some of those features sound so helpful I wish they were available in non-vehicular situations.

Wouldn't you love a life-wide "lane departure warning" to tell you when your career or relationship was veering dangerously off course? Or a "blind spot warning" to alert you to flaws you don't recognize in others or yourself? Who among us couldn't benefit from a "forward collision warning" to steer us away from bad decisions?

Don't believe the salesman. These shoes will never be comfortable!

But back to the cars. Perhaps no one is better positioned to see how confusing it's all become than David Ganley, the owner of [Ganley Auto Advisors](#), an Ipswich-based firm that helps clients buy used or new cars, and then, as part of the service, walks them through the vehicle's features.

Ganley has been in the advisor business for 17 years, and when I asked him how much longer learning a car takes now than when he started, he gave his answer not in hours or minutes, but in an even more descriptive comparative unit of time: "It's ridiculous," he said.

The task of learning about the safety and infotainment features can be "overwhelming," he said. "We find that a lot of our clients just shut down."

Ganley is no Luddite, but part of him is mourning what progress has taken.

"I'm old school enough that I feel there is something beautiful about the simplicity of an automobile," he said. "You are shuttling through space and time in your own little capsule."

Just you and your apps and a car that won't get out of your grill.

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