

Audi's driverless car goes racing

Audi is sending a driverless car up one of the most challenging hillclimbs in the world, the classic Pike's Peak hillclimb course, to show off its "self-drive" technology.

By David Williams

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The German firm is fitting a 2.0-litre TTS Coupe quattro with its "Autonomous" system, essentially a computer in the boot that will guide the car along the 13 twisting miles of the Pikes Peak hillclimb near Colorado Springs, USA.

The project is being overseen by the Volkswagen Group Automotive Innovation Laboratory and although it will not be a competition run, Audi says it will help the firm "explore the best capabilities of current and future driver assistance technologies to enhance the experience behind the steering wheel for future driver generations".



The driverless Audi on the desolate upper reaches of Pike's Peak

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According to Audi – motto Vorsprung Durch Technik, or progress through technology – the system could one day help motorists respond more effectively to changing traffic conditions to reduce road congestion and allow better reactions to hazards. It could even help drivers with routine tasks such as locating parking spaces.

Dr Burkhard Huhnke, executive director of the VW group's electronics research laboratory, said: "We believe that developing a car that can perform as well and respond as rapidly as a 'professional' driver, like a race or rally driver, will eventually be able to drive its way around incidents in a way that a 'normal' driver couldn't.

"While a less experienced driver may freeze or make the wrong 'correction', the Autonomous TTS would be able

to take over or guide the driver to escape from a critical situation. It could also compensate if a driver is inattentive to conditions or distracted but, of course, it won't prevent all accidents."

Although driverless, the Audi will be stopped remotely if it gets into trouble. It has a telemetry system transmitting data to a control centre, allow operators to shut the car down if they sense trouble.

The date for the Pikes Peak attempt will be announced later.

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