

Uber pilot uses phone tech to improve safety proactively

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Uber has made a name globally in over 50 countries as a ride-getting service using apps to connect needful passengers to drivers. According to *The Guardian*, Uber's app has been downloaded millions of times and it claims to have served up more than 1 billion rides.

Clearly, a reputation for safety can be a deal-maker or breaker for such a business, depending on how much attention the [company](#) places on making sure riders and [drivers](#) reach the destinations in one piece and their record of incidents.

Uber has been making a number of tech-enhancing moves to get the feedback they want from both riders and drivers, to raise their own how-are-we-doing operations.

"It's why we insist that people in the driver's seat rate their passengers after each ride, and vice versa. If the rating is low, we ask why. It might be that a driver is unhappy about an unruly rider. Or a rider is worried that her driver was going too fast...increasingly technology can help get to the truth. Over time, we hope to use technology to improve safety proactively," said a company post.

They recognize that speeding is the root cause of many accidents. "In 2012 speeding was responsible for nearly one in three fatal accidents in the U.S., causing over 10,000 deaths that year alone. And distracted driving is just as big a problem."

(Speaking of distractions, if you use the Uber app in Charlotte, North Carolina you might find a Bop It toy in the back of your driver's car, said Joe Sullivan, Chief Security Officer. "Folks there have found it's a great way to keep drunk riders entertained so they don't distract their driver.")

Sullivan posted an announcement on Tuesday that Uber is running a pilot program involving smartphone tech—namely gyrometers, (if for example gyrometer data shows that drivers are constantly moving their phones around, the company can offer them mounts to fix the problem), GPS and accelerometers.

These features will show how often a vehicle starts and stops as well as

overall speed. "If a rider complains that a driver accelerated too fast and broke too hard, we can review that trip using data."

CNET examined the announcement from both the rider's and driver's vantage points. Part of the headline suggested the driver's side in "Uber can track your driver's phone to verify your complaint."

Lance Whitney in *CNET*: "The overall goal is to track and crack down on a driver's potentially risky behavior, such as speeding, distracted driving, and texting or speaking on a phone while driving. But sometimes a passenger can give the driver a hard time, complaining that the ride is going too slowly or that it's taking too long. In that case, it's the driver's word against the passenger's. [Checking](#) the smartphone data can help determine who is in the right."

The smartphone tracking announcement on Tuesday belongs to a number of moves by Uber to add features that will deliver appeal to new passengers and those who have used the service before.

Earlier this month, Whitney said, the company unveiled its Uber Trip Experiences. Customers can get music, news bulletins and travel tips with it. The company has also been testing a ride-identification feature that makes it possible for a passenger waiting for his Uber ride to recognize the driver via SPOT, a windshield-mounted device using a color that brings the driver and passenger together.

This is a color-coded lighting system. The company announced it in December, saying "We've provided some of our local driver partners with SPOT devices that are attached to their car windshields. When a rider requests a trip and is matched with a SPOT-enabled driver, the rider will be asked to select a color in the app while waiting. The rider can even light up their phone screen by pressing and holding on the color to help the driver quickly identify them. When the driver arrives, the

SPOT device on his or her windshield will glow in the rider's chosen color."

In an article on Tuesday, Uber told *The Guardian* that it is running or is planning several experiments [designed](#) to gain more influence over the behavior both of drivers and passengers. "Taken together, these efforts could amount to a subtle form of quality control."

More information: newsroom.uber.com/curb-your-enthusiasm/

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