

Spooktacular car tech

28 October 2020, by Cameron Rogers Of Edmunds



This image provided by General Motors, shows the display of a 2020 GMC Sierra HD feature called Transparent Trailer, one of the few pickup trucks that provides an image of the road behind a trailer. This optional feature uses augmented reality to project an image of the road on the front of a trailer, giving the illusion of a transparent trailer. (General Motors via AP)

Whether it's a ghostly image that makes objects seemingly disappear or a spectral presence turning the steering wheel, modern cars are loaded with more tricks than a haunted house. But these features don't represent automakers getting in the Halloween spirit—they are actually the latest driving aids designed to make piloting a car easier. Here are a few of Edmunds experts' favorite tech features guaranteed to make your hair stand on end.

HANDS-FREE DRIVING

You drive up a highway on-ramp, merge with traffic and press a button. Remove your hands from the wheel, and the wheel will turn on its own to keep you centered in the lane. Keep your feet away from the pedals, and yet the car slows down and speeds up automatically. You aren't in the driver's seat of the Plymouth Fury in "Christine" ? your car is driving itself.

While Tesla's Autopilot system gets a lot of press, General Motors' Super Cruise is the only truly hands-free driving system currently on the market. It only works in certain situations—primarily on divided highways that have been pre-mapped by GM—but if you're on the right road, you can take your hands off the wheel and the car will drive itself.

Cadillac introduced this feature on its CT6 luxury sedan back in 2018, and it's finally rolling it out to more affordable vehicles, such as the CT4 small sedan. It will be available in other brands in the General Motors portfolio in the near future.

A similar system will debut next year on the Ford Mustang Mach-E. Certain BMWs can be optioned with the Extended Traffic Jam feature today, though it only works at low speeds.

AUGMENTED REALITY

You are following your navigation system's turn-by-turn instructions, and all of a sudden the central infotainment screen displays an image of the view ahead, complete with data and signs you can't see in real life. Don't worry—you're not seeing visions from the Upside Down from "Stranger Things."

What you're noticing is your car's augmented reality tech. AR gives you more context about your environment. With Mercedes-Benz's MBUX infotainment system, AR introduces a graphical overlay on the central screen. If you're using the car's navigation system, for example, the map view will switch to a live camera feed with animated turn signals showing you where to make turns. This feature is slowly coming to other models as well, such as the new 2021 Cadillac Escalade.



This image provided by General Motors shows the 2021 Cadillac Escalade, an upcoming SUV that features Cadillac's Super Cruise technology. Unlike Tesla's Autopilot, Super Cruise offers a truly hands-free driving experience. (Jessica Lynn Walker/General Motors via AP)

TOWING CAMERAS

Towing can be as bone-chilling as an episode of "The Haunting of Hill House," especially if you're first learning how to pull a trailer. But many pickup trucks now offer driving aids that can significantly reduce the stress of towing.

The GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado full-size trucks offer a feature called Transparent Trailer that uses AR. Simply attach and wire an optional camera to the back of the trailer, and the rearview image displayed on the touchscreen shows the road behind the trailer projected on its front. This gives the illusion of a see-through trailer. Ram and Ford offer a similar system on their newest pickups, though they display a simple image behind the trailer rather than a trick AR overlay.

WIRELESS APPLE CARPLAY AND ANDROID AUTO

One of our favorite features in modern cars is smartphone integration via Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. These systems allow you to control your smartphone's most popular apps using your

car's display screen. Normally, you have to connect your phone to the infotainment system with a USB cord to make them work.

But the newest cars on the market support wireless smartphone capability, eliminating the need for a cord. Pair this feature with a wireless device charging pad, and you've banished your need for a cord as easily as the Ghostbusters taking out a poltergeist.

Luxury automakers have offered wireless smartphone integration for a few years, with luxury brands such as Audi and BMW leading the charge. More budget-friendly models are on the way, however, including the Kia K5 sedan, new Volkswagen ID.4 electric SUV and a number of 2021 model year Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet and GMC vehicles.

PHONE KEYS

Lock your key fob in the case next to Annabelle's in "The Conjuring" by using your phone to open and start your car instead. Using your phone as a key is a concept introduced by the Tesla Model 3 a few years ago, and other automakers are finally following suit. The Lincoln Corsair allows you to use your phone as a vehicle key, as does the Hyundai Sonata—though Hyundai's version is currently limited to select Android phones only. Apple's forthcoming Car Key feature also turns the iPhone into a key.

EDMUNDS SAYS: From cars that steer themselves to transparent trailers, there are a ton of spooktacular tech features to get you into the Halloween spirit.

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