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References

Safety lies in new technology

the main idea

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Important info

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Cars making

- ▶ New safety features are no longer exclusive to high-end cars
- ▶ How a gadget can stop you from falling asleep at the wheel

Examples of new safety features. Active assist

Cars that respond to voice commands. Cars that park themselves. Cars that alert you when you're drowsy, vibrate like a rumble strip when you drift into the next lane, or even slam on your brakes before you slam into a pedestrian.

Cutting-edge auto technology follows a predictable path. Though they usually start at the high end, advances that address basic safety problems eventually make their way throughout automakers' product lines.

For instance, electronic stability control will become mandatory in the US for the 2012 model year - fitting for a technology that the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says can cut the risk of fatal rollover crashes by 75 per cent.

On the other hand, features, gizmos and gadgets that mostly make your ride more enjoyable sometimes linger as luxury options. This year's Infiniti M offers a Forest Air system that shuts off air intakes if it detects a noxious odour outside the car, and filters cabin air if something stinks inside. Mainstream automakers will probably make you sniff for yourself for a long time to come.

But this year's car buyers may be in for some intriguing surprises when they go vehicle shopping. High-tech-for-all is a theme that pops up repeatedly in pitches from automakers.

"Our tech strategy is really about democratising technology for the masses - rolling out technology that you would think would only be available on a higher-priced car," says Ford's Marisa Bradley.

Ford already offers stability control across its product line.

And Bradley says the new Ford Focus, due out early this year, will include such high-tech features as a voice-command system. It will even

The Ford cars

offer Active Park Assist, an automated parallel-parking system that Bradley says improves on the one developed several years ago for Lexus, Toyota's luxury brand.

What else is new in higher-end showrooms, or already en route to the mainstream? Here are some technologies worth examining even if you can't afford them just yet:

Lane departure warnings
When I taught my daughters to drive, they got sick of hearing me say, "The lane is your friend. Stay with it, and you'll be safe."

INSIDE INFO
More than 40 models feature the frontal collision warning systems says *The Car Book*.

Good system!
Infiniti has gone further than most, according to spokesman Kyle Bazemore. Several years ago, it introduced a lane-departure warning system that beeps at a driver who strays. For 2011, Infiniti married that to a blind-spot warning system that uses radar sensors to tell when another vehicle is in an adjacent lane's blind spot.

The result, called Blind Spot Intervention, pulses the brakes on the opposite side if there's a vehicle in the blind spot, generating driver feedback that Bazemore likens to "a big gust of wind."

Mercedes introduced a similar pair of high-tech safety features this model year, Active Lane-Keeping Assist and Active Blind-Spot Assist, which generate steering-wheel feedback that spokesman Dan Barile compares to crossing a rumble strip.

Lane-warning systems are also offered in at least some models by Volvo, Audi, Cadillac, Saab, Buick, Nissan and Hyundai, according to the

2011 edition of *The Car Book*, published by the Centre for Auto Safety.

Blind-spot warnings
Available in a variety of US vehicles and imports, these systems typically show a visible warning when a vehicle is detected in a car's blind spot.

Volvo uses a high-tech camera that looks for headlights and spinning wheels, so it can distinguish cars or motorcycles from fixed objects you pass. If a vehicle is there, you'll see a small amber light when you look at the outside mirror.

"You don't notice till you look in the mirror for a lane change," says spokesman Daniel Johnston.

Drowsiness detection
Volvo's Driver Alert system alerts you if you begin weaving within your lane, a telltale sign of drowsiness. It beeps and flashes a coffee cup in a dashboard panel, with the helpful advice: "Time for a break".

Mercedes says its system monitors 70 factors, including how you handle the steering wheel. Barile said a sleepy driver is likely to make a "burst of corrective steering," for instance. The system notices, and triggers a warning.

Frontal collision warning
According to *The Car Book* the frontal collision warning is mostly available in luxury brands, but Toyota's Prius and Sienna minivan also has it.

Some just warn. Others apply your brakes to avoid accidents. Volvo has a version that detects pedestrians, and can stop your car before you hit one.

There may be risks if your car does too much for you, says Jack Gillis, author of *The Car Book*. But he likens these high-tech safety system to "technological vaccines." They may not be perfect, but they can clearly save lives.

Cars in high tech can light in mirror outside

Many factors can monitor by safety system

available in lux, model but Prius & Sienna are regular

may be perfect but it can save lives