TO DRIVE OR NOT TO DRIVE?

THEN

It's already been over 3 years since people started hearing about self-driving cars. The concept of cars driving themselves seemed like something right out of a sci-fi movie. Then, people started thinking about how safe these cars would be. Think about it, would you trust a computer enough to drive you to places? This was a serious issue to be addressed by the manufacturer of the cars as well as well as legal authorities. Thus began the journey of rigorous testing and development of this technology. The first year of research that is, by 2015 we had cars which needed tech support within about 15 miles. Needless to say this wasn't very satisfactory.

NOW

Two years later the leaders in self driving cars are Google and General Motors. They have shown tremendous improvements since their first prototype with cars being able to drive themselves over 500 miles before needing tech support. Automotive Companies like Tesla, Nissan and Delphi are not far behind.

Of course, all this is the testing phase; you don't need to worry about crashing into a car and having no one to shout at unless of course you're a regular visitor at Mountain View!

These cars have the option of disengagements as well, which is a Manual mode of sorts which allows the car to be controlled remotely or from inside. These are needed in case of any software or hardware failures or maybe just because feel like driving.

Also, control with a joystick isn’t completely implausible. You might need to brush up on your NFS skills a little!

Google's fleet of these 'Self-Driving Smart Cars' drove over 630,000 miles with just 124 disengagements. Disengagements need not mean there was a failure; it just means that the company is trying out new tests.

Tesla is already well established in making electric cars with complex AI's and is now using the real world information collected from their customers to improve their 'Autopilot' systems.

ARE WE THERE YET?

Unfortunately, the answer is no. We are still nowhere close to allowing these cars into crowded roads. But, looking at the pace with which this technology is improving, a vision of streets filled with driver-less cars is definitely a plausible future. Coming closer to home, these cars might be late to arrive in India for obvious reasons, but technology is surpassing all conventional barriers and it is an interesting idea that we may someday have driver-less Uber's and Ola's. The testing is only producing better results day by day and with the current brilliant minds that the world has, all that stands between this marvelous reality of an automatic and tech oriented world is time.