

Trends hitting the road in 2016

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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There is no doubt that the automotive sector is going through one of its most disruptive phases since Henry Ford introduced the Model T. However, most of the vehicle trends in 2016 are tweaks of continuing developments that are still unlikely to come to fruition for a few years yet.

1. Autonomous driving

Thirty years ago self-driving cars were even too far-fetched for the 'Back to the Future' franchise. And although there's not much chance of seeing them on the road any time soon, they are on the horizon.

South Africa's own Elon Musk seems ahead of the game. He announced a software update to the [Tesla S7](#) which allows autonomous driving such as steering within a lane, changing lanes (with the tap of the indicator), and maintaining 'traffic aware' cruise control.

"The technology exists, but the issue is legislation," says Steve Smith, editor of *CAR magazine*. In other words there are no laws in place to govern cars that aren't controlled by a human hand.

But self-driving cars are already proving themselves on the racetrack. According to [TopGear](#), Audi reported an autonomous version of its new RS7 "turned in lap times that were better than those of sports car drivers" at California's tricky Sonoma raceway.



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2. On-demand mobility

Considering that Uber is operating in more than 300 countries and literally growing by the minute, on-demand mobility is the driving force behind autonomous cars.

"... the imperative for an autonomous vehicle is not being driven by consumer demand, but by a powerful economic force central to the success of the on-demand mobility market. This is why Uber is investing heavily in developing autonomous vehicles. Eliminating the driver in the on-demand model radically changes the economics to the considerable benefit of the service provider."

"Under Uber's current business model, approximately 60-80% of revenues stay with the car owner. Driverless vehicles would put most of that revenue into the coffers of the on-demand services providers," say Jonathan Matus and Stefan Heck on Techcrunch.com.

Similarly, car-sharing apps will continue disrupting the car hire business just as much as Uber continues to affect the traditional taxi industry. South Africa saw its first participant in this market in 2015, when locomute.co.za launched.

3. Green vehicles

"There's been very little uptake of green cars. There's still range anxiety and commuters need to get used to the mindset of plugging in cars, much as we do with our mobile devices, when we get home or to the office," says Smith. But, once again, it's the on-demand market that may breathe new life into developments in hybrids and electric cars.

"As the on-demand mobility market dramatically increases demand for electric vehicles, that demand will put downward pressure on the price of such vehicles (and the battery and electric motor technologies that scale them) while driving improvements in performance. This sets up a virtuous cycle that will rapidly expand the number of electric vehicles on our roads," say Matus and Heck.



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4. Gesture control

Not much is expected to change on the outside of vehicles, with most innovation found in the interior in the coming year, says Smith. For example, gesture control, no that's not the one-figure salute most motorists are all too familiar with,

recognises common hand gestures to control volume, and answer or reject cellphone calls.

It will be a standard feature of the new [BMW 7 Series](#). The range is due for launch in South Africa in February 2016, says Smith.

Future trends in vehicles are being largely driven by the on-demand mobility trend, which is, in turn, invigorating research and development in autonomous driving and green vehicles. While new luxury vehicles jam-packed with tech features to make driving effortless will hit the road in 2016.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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