
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Driving

The logo for BBC Learning English, consisting of the text 'BBC LEARNING ENGLISH' in white on a dark green rectangular background.

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Alice

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Alice...

Neil

And I'm Neil. What do you think about autonomous cars, Alice?

Alice

An **autonomous** – or independent and driverless – car is a vehicle that is capable of sensing its environment and navigating without human input. I think they're a great idea.

Neil

And **navigate** means to find the way to get to a place. I'm not sure I would trust a computer to drive me. It might go wrong and crash into a wall.

Alice

Maybe, but actually most car accidents involve an element of human error, and **human error** means 'the mistakes we make because we're human'. For example, people who are behind the wheel while tired or drunk – or distracted.

Neil

Behind the wheel: in other words, in control of a car. Yes, I often see people talking on their mobile phones – or texting – instead of looking at the road.

Alice

They are being irresponsible drivers, Neil. Driving is the subject of today's show. I have a question for you. On average, how many people around the world die each day from road accidents? Is it...

- a) 300?
- b) 3,000?
- Or c) 30,000?

Neil

And I'm going to say b) 3,000.

Alice

Well, we'll see if you were right or not later on in the show. Are you a petrol head, Neil?

Neil

No, I'm not a **petrol head** – which is someone who loves cars and driving. But I know Eddie Jordan, a racing team owner, is. And what does he love about driving? He'll answer this question himself. Let's listen.

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Eddie Jordan, racing team owner

When I get in a car I feel a different person, I feel that I'm now in control. I can turn on the music or I can turn it off. I can do all sorts of different things that I feel good about. When I was flat out with the Jordan team I did have a driver and that was one to be able to make calls and or be able to receive calls or to be able to work in the car, not because I didn't want to drive and I always felt cheated because there was a driver there taking the pleasure that I should be having. So when I get in a car it has to be a fun experience.

Neil

Eddie Jordan there. And doing something **flat out** means at maximum capacity. Do you feel like a different person when you're driving, Alice?

Alice

No. And – unlike Eddie Jordan – I'd love to have a driver or a driverless car, for that matter. It gives you time to do other things, like getting some work done. I certainly wouldn't feel cheated of the pleasure of driving!

Neil

I agree with Eddie Jordan. I would feel a bit cheated. And I have to admit: I'm a bit of a **backseat driver**. I sit in the passenger seat and give the driver unwanted advice.

Alice

Well just think, Neil, in a driverless car, you wouldn't need to give the computer advice because it would be making the right decisions to get you to your destination safely.

Neil

But can you override the computer? You know, if you felt that it was making bad decisions?

Alice

Override in this context means 'to stop an automatic action by taking control yourself'. Airline pilots do that, don't they? They fly on autopilot for most of the journey, but override it in order to take control of the plane for take-off and landing.

Neil

I would feel happier if I could take back control of an automated car if I wanted to.

Alice

Well, let's listen now to Brian Fung, a technology reporter, who's experienced what it is to be in a driverless car that has no steering wheels, no brake pedals, no emergency brake, no gear shifter. Google is developing a car in which everything will be self-contained.

INSERT

Brian Fung, technology reporter

Well, the biggest thing you notice right off the bat is that the car accelerates a little bit more aggressively than a regular car might and it brakes a little more aggressively than a regular car might but other than that it takes about ten seconds for you to get pretty comfortable. And the car knew how to stop for red lights; it knew how to run through yellow lights, it could detect pedestrians and navigate its way around parked cars. All in all, it felt very similar to a regular car-driving experience. And I think that's one of the most surprising and exciting things about it – it's just how mundane it was.

Neil

Brian Fung says he noticed right off the bat that the Google car accelerated and braked more aggressively than a regular car – and **right off the bat** means 'immediately'.

Alice

But he also says it took him only ten seconds to get used to it and feel comfortable, as the car navigated appropriately and responded to different traffic situations, including pedestrians and parked cars.

Neil

Well, that all sounds very nice, but I think I'd still prefer to be **in the driving seat** – and that means 'in control of a situation'. You can take the driverless car, and do your work, Alice.

Alice

Well, the future is likely to be all about automated transport – planes, trains, buses, and cars – and you simply won't have a choice, Neil.

Neil

Maybe you'll be allowed to hire a car you can drive yourself, just for fun.

Alice

Maybe. But I like the idea of a future with safe driverless roads.

Neil

I still need some convincing. And that brings us back to today's quiz question. Can you tell us the answer, now please, Alice?

Alice

Of course I can! I asked: On average, around how many people around the world die each day from road accidents? Is it... a) 300, b) 3,000 or c) 30,000?

Neil

And I said 3,000.

Alice

And unfortunately Neil, that's right! Nearly 1.3 million people die in road crashes each year, on average 3,287 deaths a day. That's according to Annual Global Road Crash Statistics.

Neil

Now, here are the words we learned today:

autonomous

navigate

human error

behind the wheel

petrol head

flat out

backseat driver

override

right off the bat

in the driving seat

Alice

And that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Don't forget to join us again soon!

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary

autonomous
independent

navigate
to find the way to get to a place

human error
the mistakes we make because we're human

behind the wheel
in control of a car

petrol head
somebody who loves cars and driving

flat out
performing to maximum capacity

backseat driver
a passenger in a car who gives the driver unwanted advice

override
to stop an automatic action by taking control your self

right off the bat
immediately

in the driving seat
in control of a situation