What Began as a Tool for Mechanicsâ€¦.

Description

ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s called a Ã¢â‚¬Å“data portÃ¢â‚¬Â• and I believe it began to he standard equipment in cars about 1995. DonÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t quote me on that but, suffice it to say, itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s a development we know took place.

Ok, here we go. This data port enables mechanics to connect computerized diagnostic computers to your car quickly. Not only can they Ã¢â‚¬Å“seeÃ¢â‚¬Â• into your engine quickly they can, theoretically, identify and quickly correct problems in the automobile. That has the benefit of saving on labor hours for the consumer, as well as giving the mechanics the ability to handle a greater volume of customers.

Invented by the automobile industry by the hybridization of electronics and mechanical devices, some other people come along and come up with a way to further their work, at no significant cost. Enter the law enforcement profession. The data port is not merely an interface into your vehicles Ã¢â‚¬Å“propulsionÃ¢â‚¬Â• system it has been fortified by being given a short, but telling memory. Like the sibling we had that reveled in reporting our egregious acts of immaturity and boundary testing to our parents the data pat retains a constantly refreshing memory of what you had the vehicle doing for the last 30 seconds.

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30 seconds? ThatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s not long you think. Just for fun, stop doing anything else and watch your watch via clock for 30 seconds. This will recalibrate you as to how long 30 seconds is. With things like speed, acceleration and breaking being recorded, quite an accurate picture can he quickly reconstructed, completely unbiased by people with agendas. When an accident occurs, an information recovery specialist will use specialized equipment to record the vehicles last 30 seconds of data. Certainly this type of information retroviral will or must have been judged as legal, as is permissible to search based on Ã¢â‚¬Å“probable cause,Ã¢â‚¬Â• when a crime has occurred. If there was an accident, it certainly follows that a warrant-less search is in order. Ã¢â‚¬Å“TheyÃ¢â‚¬Â• now have what you did (and did not do) for permanent record. I would hope this would cause one to consider this, and to meditate on whether personal driving habits should be changed.

It gets better. Look how far weÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ve come in less than 10 years: From the automobile engineer to the mechanics to law enforcement. Just where can we go next? Enter an industry that grew from the premise of sharing risks to the one that has become risk adverse and Ã¢â‚¬Å“currencyÃ¢â‚¬â€œphilic:Ã¢â‚¬Å“ Insurance. About a month ago, I caught the last portions of a news report on how an insurance company in the northern mid-west is experimenting with having customers place a device on their carÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s data port to record not just the last 30 seconds of data as they roll into their driveways at the end of the day, but all day long. When you get home, you remove the data collection module, hook it up to your computer and upload your dayÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s driving to the insurance companyÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s computer. Once your data (provided voluntarily) is there, the insurance company software will take over and analyze your driving.

How could a same person volunteer to do this? ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s simple, the insurance company offers an attractive incentive: a 15% discount. IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d be willing to bet this Ã¢â‚¬Å“projectÃ¢â‚¬Â• is

presented as a way to collect live data for the actuaries to review and analyze, So the company will be able to mitigate the isles farther. That certainly Sounds fair, but the real question is in which direction is the risk being attenuated? ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s not in your favor.

As time passes, some incredibly compulsive math managers (actuaries) will sit down with computer programmers and discuss which combination, data points from the daily data capture files will indicate an unsafe (read: someone who we think will cost us money) driver is. The programmers will return to their cubicles and begin coding the proper Ã¢â‚¬Å“algorithmsÃ¢â‚¬Â• to apply to received data. This process, in and of itself, is working material for an entire other post but that will have to he done later.

Just close you eyes for a brief moment, get in touch with your inner child and imagine your flood of emotions when, as you have your first cup of coffee, you find an email from your wonderfully protective, good neighbors type insurance carrier subject line: Ã¢â‚¬Å“You insurance is canceled.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Oops, thatÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s traumatic. Try this line: Ã¢â‚¬Å“Your insurance rates have been raised.Ã¢â‚¬Â• Sin confident your blood pressure is higher as a result and you may even have wondered (in the first scenario), â€œhow will I get to work today?Ã¢â‚¬Â•

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Ina perfect world, a perfect set of computer code will be able to weed out aggressive drivers from the pack. On the other hand, were far from a coherent problem solving program. In the January, 2005 issue of Ã¢â‚¬Å“Scientific American,Ã¢â‚¬Â• pages 36 through 37A have an article discussing robotics and Hans Moravec of Carnegie Mellon University and Seegrid Corporation fame, figures a Mac G5 (dual processor) 2Ghz computer is sort of at the top of current mainstream computing ability and he rates itÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s intelligence above a guppy and below a mouse. The news is computing power is improving, but it wonÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be until about 2040 until computing power reaches that of humans. In the meantime, that means the fate of your driving record will be determined by either a smart fish, or a less than smart rodent. That, I submit, will jump start your heart better than a portable defibrillator.

All of this reminds me of the BBC produced series Ã¢â‚¬Â•ConnectionsÃ¢â‚¬Â• of about 20 years ago. This started as a way to service a car more efficiently and it ends up being the sibling that always ratted you out, and all at no cost to anyone except the original designers of the data port.

As a porting thought, consider the current Rush Limbaugh prescription drug Ã¢â‚¬Å“shoppingÃ¢â‚¬Â• charges and how the Police collected RushÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s medical records from his doctors, without a warrant. That issue is presently headed for the Florida Supreme Court to determine the legality of this type of evidence seizure. Put that in the context of personal daily driving statistics being stored in the information systems of insurance companies. Will insurance companies willingly turn over information demanded by someone with a badge? ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s probably much clearer to assume that a Ã¢â‚¬Å“doctor-patient privileged relationshipÃ¢â‚¬Â• would be upheld, but I doubt that few people would think to apply that quality of protection to information held by the insurance firms.

As the computing power of the insurance companies computers grow, so will the capabilities of vehicle computers. With Ã¢â‚¬Å“On-star,Ã¢â‚¬Â• callers are electronically located by GPS. Cell phones have a GPS locating feature in ones produced in the last few years. You can bet that all vehicles will soon be fitted automatically with such equipment, and interfacing it to the data port will he a simple thing. When this occurs, Sin sure downloaded data from this pat will include position reports. As with the mechanics into it will quickly become a mandatory thing, and it could even be used to write speeding and other traffic violations automatically.

We will accept this story creeping, penetration into our lives without a thought, other than how it enhances am lives on a minute-to. Minute basis, being concerned little about the threat to personal privacy this will beget.

Category

1. History
2. Public Service
3. Technology

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