Autonomous transportation: Volkswagen Truck & Bus is leading the way

With projects ranging from autonomous vehicles in mines, through platooning on Singapore’s public roads, to driverless safety vehicles on German highways, Volkswagen Truck & Bus can deliver it all and is a pioneer in the field of autonomous driving.

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Volkswagen Truck & Bus is already well prepared for the advent of autonomous driving: The Group can deliver what customers are looking for within the current regulatory framework without any ifs, ands, or buts. Volkswagen Truck & Bus believes the best way of achieving autonomous driving is to adopt a step-by-step approach: Initially implementing industrial applications in non-public areas, moving on to trucks and buses covering longer distances, and finally focusing on urban distribution services and passenger transportation.

Driving at level 5 is already a reality

Level 5 autonomous driving is no longer a pipe dream. Full autonomy is already a reality — vehicles developed by Volkswagen Truck & Bus are already running on non-public roads — and is being vigorously pursued by the Group. “Our goal,” explains Andreas Renschler, “is to rapidly further develop this area and start serial production within 18 to 24 months.”

Autonomous vehicles in mines

Fully autonomous vehicles from Scania for use in mines are already available. The first vehicle will be shipped to a customer in the next few weeks. “And even though this mining truck is driverless,” says Henrik Henriksson, CEO of Scania, “fully autonomous driving doesn’t necessarily mean that the driver’s seat in the truck has to remain empty.”

Intelligent technology is paving the way for autonomous driving in the form of an ever growing number of driver assistance systems. It also offers significant advantages for manned trucks in general: “Intelligent systems reduce accidents,” explains Henrik Henriksson, “and make driving easier.”

aFAS: MAN’s driverless safety vehicle

MAN too in cooperation with seven partners from industry, research, and administration has impressively demonstrated with the BMWI-subsidized research project “aFAS” how far the
technology of autonomous driving has evolved. For the first time in Germany, a driverless MAN truck is driving autonomously as a safety vehicle for mobile road maintenance works.

Platooning on public roads

“Platooning,” says CEO Andreas Renschler, “is quite clearly the first stage of autonomous driving on public roads.” The necessary technology is ready at Volkswagen Truck & Bus. For example, Scania is currently working full steam ahead on a very special platooning solution for Singapore.

The Scania platoon for Singapore is being designed for the world’s first fully viable and regular truck platoon service running on public roads. This platoon will comprise a total of four vehicles transporting containers between different terminals at the port using public roads. Only the first truck in the platoon will have a driver, while the three trucks running behind this lead truck will be autonomous.

Sights set on cross-brand technology

The next step will involve the integration of truck convoy operations across all brands, in other words putting together platoons made up of different brands of vehicles. Under the roof of Volkswagen Truck & Bus, Scania, and MAN will be at the forefront of the technology, and will jointly develop standards to guide the entire sector.

Fellow Truck: Group-wide technology of the highest intelligence

Volkswagen Truck & Bus is working closely together with Volkswagen Group Research to make fully autonomous transportation on public roads a viable option in the medium to long term. “Fellow Truck” is the name of one of the projects aiming to achieve a maximum level of technical intelligence and successively integrate modules of artificial intelligence into vehicles.

“The aim of this project,” explains Anders Nielsen, “is to enable the transportation of goods and people on public roads with level 5 autonomy and on a broad scale.”

Self-learning systems within the realms of possibility

With “Fellow Truck,” even self-learning vehicles will enter the realms of possibility in the longer term. Where possible, vehicle navigation and guidance will no longer be based on lane markings. Fellow Truck can also be seen as an exemplary model, demonstrating how effectively the development strategy at MAN, Scania, Volkswagen Truck & Bus, and Volkswagen AG is universally aligned across all brands.

It won’t be long before it is implemented in practice. With respect to the expected timescales, Andreas Renschler states that: “We assume the autopilot will be ready for technical operation by 2022 at the latest.”
Volkswagen Truck & Bus GmbH is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Volkswagen AG and a leading commercial vehicle manufacturer worldwide with its MAN, Scania, and Volkswagen Caminhões e Ônibus, and RIO brands. In 2016, Volkswagen Truck & Bus GmbH’s brands sold around 184,000 vehicles in total. Its offering comprises light-duty commercial vehicles, trucks, and buses which are produced at 25 sites in 17 countries. The Company had a workforce of around 77,000 worldwide across its commercial vehicle brands as of Saturday, December 31, 2016. The Group seeks to realign the transportation system through its products, its services, and as a partner for its customers.

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