



January 23, 2017

Beer Run - The First Commercial Delivery by a Self-Driving Truck

AUTOMOBILE, DIGITAL & TECHNOLOGY, TRANSPORTATION & LOGISTICS

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On October 20, 2016, a self-driving tractor-trailer traveled 120 miles down a Colorado highway and made a delivery of 51,744 cans of Budweiser beer. This incredible technological feat was accomplished by Otto, a San Francisco start-up that was purchased by Uber in August 2016 for \$680 million. The cans of beer had a special message printed on them "First delivery by a self-driving truck."

This first self-driving delivery was a complex endeavor that required collaboration between Otto, Budweiser and the state of Colorado. The truck was required to make the trip eight times with the driver behind the wheel before the first driverless delivery was allowed to proceed. The State took extra effort to make sure there were no abandoned vehicles on the side of the road and also worked with the road construction partners to make sure there was no unexpected construction on the route. The driverless truck was accompanied by four Colorado state police patrol cars and three vehicles from Otto. The professional driver did pilot the truck to the highway then hit the switch that turned on the self-driving equipment. He then retired to the cab for the rest of the trip on the highway.

What might this mean to the trucking industry in the future? The proponents of this technology cite several positive benefits, including increased safety. Since 94% of accidents are caused by human error, according to the National Highway Safety Administration, Otto believes that an autonomous or semi-autonomous vehicle would increase safety. Also the developers assume that there would be increased fuel efficiency and reduced CO₂ emissions. Lastly, proponents argue that the technology will increase truck utilization and allow truckers to rest or sleep in the cab on long hauls. They see the technology working to relieve the driver shortage. While truck drivers will never be replaced, this technology could create a situation similar to airline pilots who use autopilot to fly the plane.

We do not know how soon we will see this technology in widespread use, since there are still many technological and legislative barriers to overcome. What we do know now is this technology is closer to being commercialized, and some Colorado residents were able to enjoy a beer with the message "First delivery by a self-driving truck."

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