

An ageing model

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I was talking to a car dealer yesterday because the time has come to recognise that my 13-year-old Volvo might have reached the end of its life, at least in my ownership. I have loved its reliability, but that is now open to question, and I can no longer rely on it.

Our discussion was about the options available to me when buying second-hand, of course. What amazed me was how many of the cars now available for sale have automatic gearboxes, regardless of the power system in use.

This change was not something I had considered before. Not being an avid car enthusiast or a keen follower of the car market, I presumed that, apart from full electric vehicles, manual cars would be as popular as ever, but I was quickly put right. Whatever power system they choose, it now seems that most people do not want to use a gear lever. The explanation that I was offered was quite straightforward. I was told that, as with everything else in life, people want their cars to be kept as physically simple to control as possible, whilst at the same time they demand every form of passive electronic information and entertainment system known to humankind to be packed into the dashboard.

There are occasional moments when I realise I am not as young as I once was. This was one of them. Why anybody would want to give up the opportunity to have as much control over the car that they drive as possible is beyond me. Why they also want to cram every conceivable electronic system on earth into that car is equally baffling, when the risk of something going wrong must rise exponentially as a result.

What was politely pointed out to me was that, whether I like it or not, I could no longer avoid the electronics and might even have to learn to give up using my left foot when it comes to driving.

My question is a simple one. It is this: how can this be good for our planet? The vast majority of this technology in new cars is not, by any meaningful definition, recyclable, but it will also condemn cars that have considerable life potential left in them to early scrappage, because whichever unpredictable part fails one day, with a considerable

potential repair cost, will ultimately bring about its early demise.

Isn't this the whole crisis that we face? Ever-increasing technology, designed to reduce our capacity to act, is also killing our planet. That seems to be the situation I am being presented with if I wish to continue to drive. It has left me distinctly uncomfortable.