

Apple

Apple given licence to test self-driving cars on California roads

Company joins race with Uber and Alphabet to shape future of driverless transportation



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APRIL 14, 2017 by: **Tim Bradshaw** in California

Apple has been granted a licence to test autonomous vehicles in California, marking the public launch of its race with Uber, Alphabet and Tesla to define the future of driverless transportation.

The permit was revealed with [Apple \(http://markets.ft.com/data/equities/tearsheet/summary?s=us:AAPL\)](http://markets.ft.com/data/equities/tearsheet/summary?s=us:AAPL)'s appearance on a list of approved companies on the west coast state's automotive regulator's [website \(https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/vr/autonomous/testing\)](https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/vr/autonomous/testing) on Friday.

Apple's secretive automotive [research project \(https://www.ft.com/content/84906352-b3a5-11e4-9449-00144feab7de\)](https://www.ft.com/content/84906352-b3a5-11e4-9449-00144feab7de) has been under way for more than two years although it is still unclear how soon any product will emerge from its labs.

Last year, the company abandoned near-term efforts to build an electric vehicle itself and refocused its development work on the autonomous systems that underpin self-driving cars, people familiar with the situation have said, as company [veteran Bob Mansfield \(https://www.ft.com/content/665a068c-2134-11e7-a454-ab04428977f9\)](https://www.ft.com/content/665a068c-2134-11e7-a454-ab04428977f9)

[w.ft.com/content/doff05ca-52b1-11e6-9664-e0bdc13c3bef](http://www.ft.com/content/doff05ca-52b1-11e6-9664-e0bdc13c3bef)) was appointed as the project's new head.

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California to ease restrictions for testing of driverless cars (<http://www.ft.com/content/58d53038-05cb-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9>)

Move could pave way for robot cars to come into full public use as early as next year



The latest disclosure again highlights Apple's challenge in maintaining its notorious secrecy in product development as it enters more highly-regulated markets, from transportation to healthcare.

The company's early discussions with the California Department of Motor Vehicles were first reported in September 2015, and for several months mapping vehicles equipped with cameras and sensors were spotted close to its Cupertino headquarters.

Silicon Valley's self-driving technology industry is already starting [to look crowded \(https://www.ft.com/content/4377b4c0-0479-11e7-aa5b-6bb07f5c8e12\)](https://www.ft.com/content/4377b4c0-0479-11e7-aa5b-6bb07f5c8e12), even though no provider has deployed a full commercial service on US roads. Apple is the 30th

company to receive a permit in California, alongside carmakers such as Volkswagen, Ford and [General Motors \(http://markets.ft.com/data/equities/tearsheet/summary?s=us:GM\)](http://markets.ft.com/data/equities/tearsheet/summary?s=us:GM), as well as suppliers including Delphi and Bosch and start-ups such as Zoox, Drive.ai and Plus.ai.

The DMV said that Apple had been licensed to test three vehicles, all of which are a 2015 Lexus RX450h, with six drivers. Companies often start with a small number of permits before gradually increasing them; Tesla and GM both have more than 20 autonomous testing vehicles on California's roads while Waymo, Alphabet's self-driving division, has several dozen.

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Apple provided no new comment on its autonomous driving programme, which has never been publicly discussed by its executives.

Apple referred to a statement in December when it first [acknowledged its plans \(https://www.ft.com/content/5c643f94-b983-11e6-8b45-b8b81dd5d080\)](https://www.ft.com/content/5c643f94-b983-11e6-8b45-b8b81dd5d080)

180b6-1ffc-11e7-a454-ab04428977f9)

Luminar founder was just 17 when he started out, backed by Peter Thiel



to develop self-driving cars with a letter to the US national highways regulator.

At that time, Apple said it was “investing heavily in machine learning and autonomous systems” with an eye on “many potential applications for these technologies, including the future of transportation”.

December’s letter to the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was part of the regulator’s ongoing consultation with

manufacturers about its rules for autonomous cars.

Last month, the California DMV said it would [ease some restrictions \(https://www.ft.com/content/58d53038-05cb-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9\)](https://www.ft.com/content/58d53038-05cb-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9) on testing self-driving vehicles, potentially paving the way for robot cars to come into public use as early as next year.

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