

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Taking a spin in a self-steering Tesla

CHRISTI took Jeremy and Taylor out for a drive in her self-steering car. She was trying to make amends for her outburst against Taylor a few days earlier.

“A self-steering car?” said Taylor, “That sounds like a formula for accidents and lawsuits.”

They went out on Interstate 280, in Christi’s Tesla. The car already had cruise control, which meant you could pre-set a maximum speed, and then your car would slow down or speed up, depending on the speed of the vehicles in front of it.

But by adding the self-steering software this week, Christi could now signal left on the freeway to make a lane change, and the car would do it automatically, when there was a safe opening

This is part 64 of a 72-part fictionalized serial appearing in the Daily Post, written by John Angell Grant with illustrations by Steve Curl.

All this happened without her feet on the pedals, or her hands on the steering wheel.

“Sweet,” said Jeremy, as he watched Christi’s demonstration. “I’ll give it a try.” Christi pulled off the highway and they changed seats.

Jeremy drove back onto the highway. With his feet off the pedals, the car sped up or slowed down on its own, depending on how close the vehicle in front was; and what he had set his speed limit for.

“Take your hands off the wheel,” said Christi. Jeremy took his hands off the wheel. As the highway curved to the left, the car curved to the left. As the highway curved to the right, the car curved to the right.

“It reads the white lines,” said Christi. “Now signal left.”

Jeremy signaled left, and the car, on its own, moved into the left lane.

“Amazing,” said Jeremy. “I have to get one of these. What did it cost?”

“JJ bought it,” Christi said. “About a hundred grand. Or a hundred and twenty. Something like that. I forget.”

“Well, I won’t be getting one soon,” said Jeremy. “Unless my movie hits.” They all laughed.

“What about accidents?” said Taylor. “If you wreck it while you don’t have your feet on the pedals or your hands on the wheel, who pays?”

“The legal part still has to be worked out,” said Christi. “But they say smart cars are actually safer — that they drive better than humans.”

“What’s next?” said Taylor, “Flying cars?”

“They are already working on those,” said Christi. “They now have little fold-up airplanes that you can tow behind your car. JJ is financing one of them.”

“I hope I live long enough to see the flying car,” said Jeremy. “That would be a dream come true.”

More tomorrow.