Riding in Daimler’s new semi-autonomous big rig

In 2015, Daimler told the world it was building the world’s first self-driving semi truck. It pulled out all the stops for the big reveal of the prototype, debuting the truck on top of the Hoover Dam in the middle of the night and renting out Las Vegas Motor Speedway to offer test rides. This week at the 2019 Consumer Electronics Show, Daimler is back with the near-final production version of that truck, and we got to take another ride.

Over the last three years, Daimler has taken the technology and the ideas that were in that prototype truck and worked them into the latest version of the Freightliner Cascadia, one of the company’s most popular trucks. More importantly, Daimler says it’s ready to put the truck into production this summer and start delivering them to customers later this year.

That means that by the end of the year, truckers around the country will be able to use the new Cascadia’s driver assistance features to make their long hauls a little bit easier. The trucks are able to keep themselves centered in a lane, match the speed of a car in front from a safe distance, and alert the driver when cars or pedestrians sneak into the big blind spot on the right side of the vehicle. They can also automatically brake in an emergency, which might have been the most fun part of the test ride.

With any luck, this technology could also help scale back the thousands of crashes that involve semi trucks each year. What seems sure, though, is that this is the year that Daimler will truly embark on the path that it charted back in 2015 at that event atop the Hoover Dam. Full autonomy is still a long way

off, regardless of whether we’re talking about cars or big rigs, but tech like this can serve as a solid first step.

Photography by Sean O’Kane / The Verge

https://www.theverge.com/2019/1/8/18174526/daimler-cascadia-self-driving-semi-truck-ces-2019