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Is This What We Really Want?

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The Wall Street Journal reports that auto makers are rushing to put Web browsing technology at the reach of drivers. As the paper explains:

In an era when people can check email or browse the Web while doing everything from grocery shopping to lying on the beach, behind the wheel of a car has remained one of the few places where it just didn't happen. Over the years, auto makers have tried to introduce computers in cars, but they never really caught on with consumers.

Now, both auto makers and car-accessory companies are making a renewed push with products designed to allow drivers to do everything they can do on a desktop PC — word processing, Internet surfing, email — while sitting in the driver's seat. Screens can be mounted anywhere from near the dashboard to the back seat. While many models are meant to be installed in the dash and replace the radio entirely, car makers are betting more on tablet computers that aren't as integrated into the car or on features like larger consoles, trays and Internet connections for storing and operating laptops.

The article offers details about plans and future features. While safety concerns are noted, these concerns don't seem to put much of a damper on the auto makers' plans.

While it may seem somewhat hypocritical to raise a question about technology on a Weblog (and especially when raised by someone who has fantasized about Internet access in the car), we must wonder if this would be good for us.

The late Jacques Ellul warned us that technology itself represents a threat to humanity, and to the Christian faith. "Technical invasion does not put new wine into old bottles," he warned. "The old bottles are all being broken. The old civilizations collapse on contact with the new."

What would Ellul think of surfing the Internet in a car? He would surely see it as an ironic parable of the age. Consider this statement from Ellul's *The Technological Society*:

There is no longer respite for reflecting or choosing or adapting oneself, or for acting or wishing or pulling oneself together. The rule of life is: No sooner said than done. Life has become a racecourse...a succession of objective events which drag us along and lead us astray without anything affording us the possibility of standing apart, taking stock, and ceasing to act.

Soon, not even at a stop light.

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