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Do you feel guilty about driving a car?

Walter Hatak



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Do you feel guilty about driving a car? – What's this question all about? Whereas the term *flygskam* (flight shame) has become popular outside of Sweden in recent years, there are far fewer people who feel they need to justify driving a car.

It has become routine for booking websites to offer compensation options for the emissions produced by flights such as the financing of climate projects. However, we are yet to hear about petrol stations where you can buy climate certificates after filling up.

The difference in perception can be explained by the fact that the aircraft is the most climate-damaging means of transportation around. But a look at the breakdown of global greenhouse emissions shows that flight passengers might have less reason to feel ashamed than expected, relatively speaking, since flying accounts for 3% of total greenhouse emissions. Road traffic makes up almost 20% of global greenhouse emissions.

The day yellow safety vests came out of the glove compartment

It comes as no surprise that those governments that are serious about (averting) climate change try to take action in the area of road traffic. However, ramping up fuel prices in order to achieve a certain effect in public behaviour does not exactly bring votes. In France, this was in fact the moment the “Gilets jaunes” movement was born – annoyed protesters wearing yellow safety vests as identifying feature during their demonstrations. However, the safety aspect of these vests was quickly thrown overboard as the protests turned into riots interspersed with arson.

International motor show without cars?

The reaction in Germany to the recently announced climate policy of the federal government was a non-event as far as protests were concerned – despite the fact that it not only meant a gradual increase in taxes on petrol in the coming years, but also came with the introduction of a new motor vehicle tax based on fuel consumption. A few days before, we had seen photos of protesters taken at the largest global motor show in Frankfurt; their demands were a car-free future and a massive expansion of the bus and train network.

Tell me where your car is parked!

A recent study by the Federal Office for Motor Vehicles indicates – unsurprisingly – that the regional distribution of passenger car permits depends crucially on population density. In many rural areas (and I know this from first-hand experience) you feel like they have taken away your freedom if you don't own a car. According to the study, school bus trips account for 80 to 85% of local traffic. By contrast, the percentage of car ownership in Berlin is the lowest in Germany (“only” every third person owns a car). This means the path to a car-free future will be an arduous one; the replacement of the combustion engine seems less unrealistic by comparison.

Where to take the German engineering ingenuity?

An electric car contains only 15% of the number of parts that a car with combustion engine requires. It is accordingly “easy” to manufacture an electric car, as the example of Deutsche Post shows. Since none of the big manufacturers wanted to fulfil the particular specifications of Deutsche Post, the group just built its own electric delivery vehicle and now even considers floating the production unit on the stock exchange as spin-off due to its success.

The development of fuel cells as alternative form of propulsion requires significantly more engineering know-how and therefore harbours better perspectives as far as future jobs in the automotive sector are concerned. Here, the biggest producers diverge with regard to the question of what should be the propulsion technology of the future. As they say: it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future.

Be that as it may, we wish you an exciting, climate-neutral reading experience of our [ESG Letter](#) (without accidents).

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