



On the intelligence of cars and their drivers

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Confederation**

Inauguration of the 80th Geneva Motor Show

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Mr. President of the Motor Show,
Mr. President of the State Council,
Representatives of the federal, cantonal and municipal authorities,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I admit quite frankly and without any guilty conscience: I like driving. The car and driving pleasure do not yet figure – fortunately – among the deadly sins. I am therefore pleased to be perpetuating a tradition by opening the 80th Geneva International Motor Show.

For me, the car is and remains primarily synonymous with freedom. I drive above all in my leisure time, at the weekend, and in the summer I enjoy the advantages of a cabriolet. During the rest of the time I have to hand over the wheel to my chauffeur and take a seat in the back of the Federal Council's limousine.

Whether as a utility vehicle or as a vector of pleasure; the car is today an indispensable feature of our society. It creates mobility and is at the same time the epitome of our need for movement. We – politicians and car manufacturers – are therefore very well aware of the necessity of resolving the equation between our legitimate need for mobility and the impact on the environment, and thus on our quality of life. Bearing this in mind, I would now like to outline some promising ideas - ideas with a future.

The economic crisis and the climate problems throw down some great challenges to the automotive industry. It is essential that these challenges should be seen as an opportunity and a motivating factor; think, for example, of the promising new technologies, the impact on research or the high importance of innovation. By holding all these trump cards, you will succeed in taking up the challenges.

I am thinking here in particular of technological development and research to build engines that consume less fuel and emit fewer pollutants, of catalytic converters, particle filters, electric cars, hybrid cars, natural gas vehicles or new biofuels, for example those made from algae. There is no shortage of ideas and it is thanks to this development that I no longer have to inhale the exhaust fumes of the car in front of me but can breathe the scent of nature.

But if we want to rise to the challenges, I think we need one thing above all else: we have to become aware of what is ultimately important and what we really need. “Intelligence”, both while driving and as far as the use of the vehicle and the necessary infrastructure are concerned. That is what I describe as responsible behaviour. Even if vehicles are becoming more and more technically sophisticated and, for example, can move into parking spaces on their own, even if we can speak about “intelligent” cars, this should not cause the person behind the driving wheel to forget to use his or her head when driving. On the contrary, the driver has to be more intelligent than his or her means of transport, because he or she holds the steering wheel, operates the accelerator pedal and is in control of the situation.

The person behind the steering wheel is the greatest challenge for the automotive industry: the sector has to adapt to the driver and the consumer. Consumers today are making very clear what they want: a change to intelligent driving and to driving without a guilty conscience, which means to a more economical and more ecological style of driving. How can these expectations be fulfilled? By striving to achieve a significant reduction of fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions, or even the elimination of pollutant emissions! That is the challenge *par excellence* for the automobile manufacturers. The market for clean cars is a highly promising market!

The development of new products is only one aspect, however. Another, equally important aspect concerns the necessity of rethinking our mobility in the medium and long term. The issues involved here relate to ecology, traffic management and territory management. This discussion must also be conducted at the political level.

The age we live in is characterized by a constantly increasing demand for mobility, among other things. Today there are 4 million private cars in Switzerland, by the year 2030 there will be nearly 5 million. Certain main roads and built-up areas are already excessively congested. New concepts must urgently be found to manage this growth. Traffic congestion has many negative consequences: we spend more time on the roads, and this in turn means that we have less time for our work, our leisure time and other activities. Traffic jams cost our economy a tremendous amount of money: at present the cost to Switzerland is estimated at more than one billion Swiss francs per annum.

So that you don't get bored next time you are stuck in a traffic jam, bumper to bumper, allow me to give you a couple of ideas to ponder during the journey: if our cars have become

intelligent, then our roads also have to become intelligent. To do so, we need, among other things, to make better use of the existing infrastructure. In London or Stockholm, for example, road pricing has proved useful. It has led to a better traffic flow and contributed to a reduction of CO₂ emissions. It is often no longer possible to build new roads or to widen existing roads, particularly in the urban areas. On the other hand, it is perfectly possible to equip roads and cars with intelligent devices.

In Switzerland, discussions have already been held on, and a lot of thought has gone into, tariff management. The development of intelligent and appropriate traffic management systems is part of this process. These new systems are the subject of very controversial debate. But it is no longer enough to ignore the debate or to believe it would suffice to increase the resources in order to ease the jams on the roads. If we want our mobility to remain one of Switzerland's assets, we have to reflect on an intelligent form of mobility. Such a system, combined with efficient public transport, can also make motorists' everyday life more pleasant, not forgetting the positive impact on the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, the automotive industry has been hard-hit by the financial and economic crisis. In 2009 8% fewer new cars were sold in Switzerland compared with 2008. The industry faces some great changes, as it will have to take account of cyclical as well as structural aspects. Even if Switzerland itself does not produce any cars, the automotive industry nevertheless has a direct influence on the Swiss economy, in particular as far as spare parts, accessories and suppliers' contracts are concerned. As Minister of Economic Affairs, I am particularly aware of this fact.

In addition, I note with some satisfaction that consumption is also rising again in your sector. In January 2010 the Swiss automobile market grew by almost 6%. And also the fact that this year more than 200 exhibitors are present in Geneva is gratifying. In view of the challenges you face, I therefore encourage you to remain optimistic and confident: the automotive industry will have to adapt, but thanks to innovations it will also be able to adapt. I am convinced of this. Or to quote Henry Ford (1863-1947), one of the founding fathers of the automotive industry: "It is up to us whether we want to use the challenges as a brake or an engine."

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we should not forget, because of all the challenges that await you, driving pleasure and the aesthetics of a coachwork. That is indeed one of the main reasons why the Geneva Motor Show exists. And cars are even more beautiful to look at

when one knows that they have an “intelligent” engine - which means an economical and ecological one - beneath the bonnet.

All eyes are riveted on Geneva as the capital of automobiles for the next few days. I wish you every success for this year’s Show and a large number of visitors! Have a good journey!