

Ford's BlueCruise chases hands-free Tesla, GM

BY HENRY PAYNE

The Detroit News

Following the lead of Tesla Inc.'s Autopilot and General Motors Co.'s Super Cruise, Ford Motor Co. has telegraphed a semi-autonomous, active-drive-assist feature available with its 2021 Ford F-150 pickup and electric Mustang Mach-E.

Now that system has a name: BlueCruise.

Blue as in the colorful highlights in the instrument panel that indicate BlueCruise is available for hands-free driving on 100,000 miles of divided highways that Ford has mapped across North America. The feature, now available for purchase, will be activated by an over-the-air update on properly-equipped vehicles in the third quarter of this year.

While details are still emerging, the Ford system aims to play in the same space as Autopilot and Super Cruise. U.S. manufacturers have taken the lead in semi-autonomous systems with a view towards fully autonomous, so-called Level 5, vehicles. For now, systems like BlueCruise are Level 2 grade, requiring driver attention.

Similar to GM's Super Cruise (which debuted on the now-extinct Cadillac CT6 sedan in 2018 and is available on Escalade/CT4/CT5 models and the Chevrolet Bolt EUV), BlueCruise monitors driver engagement via a camera on the steering column.

GM's Super Cruise also monitors drivers via an infrared camera on the steering column. Tesla's Autopilot, which debuted on its Model S sedan in 2015, demands the driver keep at least one hand on the steering wheel.

With the instrument display lit blue, Ford says the pilot can easily monitor when the system is engaged. Super Cruise uses a green light bar on the steering wheel to signal operation — if the system hits an unmapped area of road or construction zone (or if it detects



With BlueCruise drive assist engaged, the instrument display in a Ford F-150 glows blue with self-driving icons, like a steering wheel and vehicle "halo." Ford/TNS

the driver is distracted), it will initiate an escalation of red lights/warning sounds urging the driver to take over. Tesla's Autopilot uses a blue steering wheel icon in the center screen to indicate engagement.

Ford says BlueCruise will work even when the driver is wearing sunglasses or a face mask, with the steering column-based camera focused on the eyes for evidence of attention.

Ford developed the system over the last few years from its Dearborn, Michigan, engineering and Palo Alto, California, labs. It did extensive national testing with a fleet of five F-150s and five Mach-Es in what it calls The Mother of All Road Trips (MOART). The BlueCruise-equipped fleet covered thousands of miles over 37 states and five Canadian provinces in a variety of weather and traffic conditions.

"I drive long-distance quite often, whether out to Boston or down to Florida to visit family or friends, and usually I mentally tire out on drives that far," said BlueCruise feature development engineer Alexandra Taylor, who logged over 3,000 miles in an F-150. "When using BlueCruise, long drives aren't nearly as mentally taxing to me."

The company calls the 100,000 miles of divided highways it has mapped "Hands-Free Blue Zones." GM claims it has mapped 200,000 miles. Tesla's system depends on onboard hardware and GPS to place it on the road and is available on all byways.

Its Navigate on Autopilot feature, however, is only available on divided highways. Drivers can set a destination, yank twice on the gear selector stalk and the EV (Autopilot is available on all Teslas for \$10,000) will automatically navigate — including with automatic lane changes — to the designated exit. Upon exiting the interstate, the navigation function of Autopilot ceases.

GM's Super Cruise works similarly when a navigation point it set. The BlueCruise and Super Cruise systems are unique in that they allow for extended hands-free driving, whereas Tesla constantly nannies the driver to keep a hand on the wheel. Tesla is beta-testing a Full Self-Driving mode enabling Navigation by Autopilot everywhere.

Using advanced camera and radar-sensing tech, BlueCruise builds on Ford's adaptive cruise system, which can follow other vehicles, lane center and recognize speed limit signs. Ford's system will not debut with whiz-bang features pioneered by Tesla like lane-change assist and predictive speed assist in turns. Ford says BlueCruise

will be upgraded in the future to include such features — updates that Super Cruise recently added.

BlueCruise is offered standard on the F-150's \$70,825

will be upgraded in the future to include such features — updates that Super Cruise recently added.



Funke brothers Ryan & Tim are the heart and soul of the "Funke" Werks experience. Factory Trained & ASE Certified with extensive knowledge with Toyota, BMW & Subaru.

We welcome all makes and models both foreign and domestic. We offer competitive pricing with premium products such as Castrol Oils. We offer your choice of Genuine Factory parts or aftermarket.

Complimentary complete vehicle inspection with every service. Pre-Purchase inspections available for a fee. Keeping Central Oregon driving with confidence since 2014.

1552 S Highway 97 Redmond, OR 97756
www.funkewerks.com | 541-923-3116



You drive it, we will hook it up!

Central Oregon's premier upfitter for all your custom needs!

Truck Accessories
LED Lighting
Car Audio
RV Accessories
SxS Accessories

We also manufacture our own line of custom UTV stereo systems and LED Light Bars! Drive Unlimited is OPEN TO THE PUBLIC for all your Upfit, car, truck, UTV and off road needs!



1776 HWY 97 • Redmond • (541) 923-8884

www.driveunlimited.com


