

Whole new language for freeway flashers

Berlin, Germany - An invention by an ingenious experimenter now means cars and lorries can say a lot more than just "Thanks" - the only thing the drivers have to learn is what the signals mean.

Some drivers like to use their indicators and like to use them a lot; others seem to have forgotten all about them. Whatever, indicators are one of the most important ways of communicating when on the road and they can be much more than just lights that blink.

"I was so pleased when a friendly truck driver said thanks to me on the motorway with his indicators," Matthias Frey told motoring.co.za.

"He was courteous enough to let another driver back into the lane after he had overtaken dangerously - and that meant the other driver was not caught in a police traffic control soon afterwards.

"He was so pleased he didn't get a ticket that he set off a complicated indicator display - it wasn't just a case of left-right-left - the indicators were flashing like disco lights."

It was this experience that got Frey thinking. The 39-year-old inventor from Germany's Black Forest started to ask himself whether a car could be used to communicate other things.

"How, for instance, can I say 'I'm sorry' or how can I show if I like somebody?" He mulled over the idea for two years then registered an invention with the German patent office for The Flashbox - it initiates automatic light signals by radio.

The hand-sized appliance is connected to the indicator system. "

"All you have to do is take the two Flashbox indicator outlets and attach them to the right and left indicator contacts", Frey said. "To prevent them from setting off the signals you have to log the supplied hand-transmitter on to the receiver.

"By pressing a button on the transmitter on the car's keyring the driver transmits an indicator signal to the box. The receiver then transmits the signal to the conventional indicator system - you can then access the signals for:

"Thanks" (left indicator, right indicator, left indicator).

"Warning" (one flash).

"Angry" (both indicators stay on for a particularly long time).

"In love" (he doesn't tell us that one!).

Of the system can even flash "Safe journey" or "Watch out!", all by pressing the button in a variety of codes.

"The problem is that many drivers still don't know the new signals," Frey says. But he hopes they will catch on as more drivers buy the device, which has been approved, Frey says, by the German transport authorities.

It costs €90 - about R900 - and truck drivers seem to be buying the most.

"They use their indicators to communicate a lot more than car drivers and they understand what all the different flashes mean," Frey said.

No easy task

Frey is not thinking of selling his invention. "I want to keep extending the system. Some time in the future I'd like cars to be able to say 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy New Year'."

But marketing the Flashbox is no easy task. Most drivers prefer to use their hooters to communicate when on the road...

- See the [TV report: "Flirting made easy"](#)

or

[the trade fair film "Language course: Indicating.](#)

- [Contact Flashbox in Germany.](#)

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