

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

<https://www.wsj.com/lifestyle/cars/waymo-self-driving-cars-san-francisco-7868eb2b>

LIFESTYLE | CARS

Waymo's Self-Driving Cars Are Suddenly Behaving Like New York Cabbies

Autonomous vehicles are adopting humanlike qualities, making illegal U-turns and flooring it the second the light goes green



Waymos were long known for their achingly cautious behavior. JEFF CHIU/AP

By [Katherine Bindley](#) [Follow](#)

Dec. 2, 2025 10:00 pm ET

SAN FRANCISCO—It was like a scene out of a movie: a pair of white Jaguars zipping through a two-lane tunnel, changing lanes at the same time in a zigzag formation. But this one had a twist. They were both Waymos, the self-driving vehicles known for their achingly cautious behavior.

“I had never seen anyone switch lanes in that tunnel,” says Sophia Yen, a startup founder who was in her car behind the two autonomous ones this past September. “It’s driving more like a taxi driver—an aggressive, New York taxi driver.”

For years while training on the streets of San Francisco and eventually transporting passengers, Waymos were the most polite drivers on the road.

Pull up to a stop sign at the same time as a Waymo and it would wait, as if to say, “No, please, after you.” If you were trying to go around another car making a left, a Waymo was sure to let you in. In short, they were drivers you wouldn’t want to get stuck behind while in a hurry.

The training wheels are off. Like the rule-following nice guy who’s tired of being taken advantage of, Waymos are putting their own needs first. They’re bending traffic laws, getting impatient with pedestrians and embracing the idea that when it comes to city driving, politeness doesn’t pay: It’s every car for itself.



Waymos appear to be putting their own needs first, bending traffic laws and getting impatient with pedestrians. GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ/AP

In September, police in San Bruno, Calif., pulled over a Waymo after witnessing it make an illegal U-turn. Last month, a Waymo hit and killed a well-known neighborhood cat in the Mission district. On a recent Thursday in Pacific Heights, a Waymo at a multilane four-way stop hit the gas along with the car next to it so it wouldn’t have to wait its turn. Seconds later, the same car decided signaling a lane change wasn’t necessary.

Jennifer Jeffries, 54, has logged nearly 3,000 minutes in Waymos since May 2024. Until recently, the Pacific Heights resident wouldn’t take one if she was headed downtown. They weren’t agile enough. She once got stuck for several

minutes behind another car that was double parked while furniture was being unloaded.

She now has no problem taking Waymos downtown and finds they maneuver as well as an [Uber](#) driver, maybe better.

“They will go around a car or get closer to a car than a human driver would,” says Jeffries. “Sometimes I’ll be in the back seat and I’ll be like, ‘Ooh that was really close.’”

One drawback: They seem to be mimicking Uber drivers in less-helpful ways: “You say pick me up at this address and they’re across the street, which I don’t appreciate,” she says.

Marc Schreiber, 49, liked it better when Waymos were strict followers of traffic laws. While walking to the gym, Schreiber found himself in a crosswalk opposite a Waymo. As soon as he’d made it past the front of the vehicle, it started accelerating.

“I was taken off guard,” says Schreiber. “My next thought was, oh they’ve changed the programming to be more aggressive.”

He was right.

Waymo has been trying to make its cars “confidently assertive,” says Chris Ludwick, a senior director of product management with Waymo, which is owned by Google parent Alphabet. “That was really necessary for us to actually scale this up in San Francisco, especially because of how busy it gets.”

Ludwick says when the vehicles are too passive, they become disruptive. Regular software updates ensure Waymos aren’t becoming a nuisance or creating chaos.

Ludwick wouldn't comment on specific incidents of rulebreaking. He says Waymos make common-sense decisions, which involve trade-offs.

Waymo says it has been trying to make its cars more 'confidently assertive.' GETTY IMAGES

"The driver is designed to respect the rules of the road," says Ludwick. "However, sometimes this is a nuanced topic and road rules can even conflict with each other."

For example, he says, you're not supposed to cross a double yellow line but you also shouldn't obstruct traffic. So if you get stuck behind a stopped delivery truck, a human would go around it even if it meant crossing the double line. Now Waymos know to do that, too.

A Waymo spokeswoman says its vehicles have driven 100 million driverless miles across San Francisco, Los Angeles, Austin, Phoenix and Atlanta. [The company reported](#) that compared with human drivers, it has had 91% fewer crashes involving a serious injury or worse.

Cossette Drossler, 65, says a friend recently told her about a Waymo pulling a "California stop." The car apparently slowed down but didn't reduce its speed to zero at an intersection.

Drossler, who lives in Pacific Heights and owns an accounting services firm, feels conflicted on the evolving behavior. She doesn't want to be behind a Waymo that's coming to a complete stop in a quiet neighborhood when no one's around. On the other hand, she doesn't entirely trust them to appropriately judge the risk.

"I do California rolling stops. I grew up in San Francisco," says Drossler, adding, "I only do it if it's safe."

Waymo says its cars are designed to come to a full stop.

There have been reports of Waymos doing the 'California stop,' which involves not actually stopping. POPPY LYNCH FOR WSJ

Police Sgt. Scott Smithmatungol, who was on patrol in San Bruno one September night, says he and his partner were looking for impaired drivers when they got to talking about Waymos and how they were starting to drive more like humans.

Just then, a Waymo opposite them in the intersection made a U-turn. The pair looked up, saw the no-U-turn sign and put their lights on. The Waymo pulled over. As Smithmatungol's partner approached the driver's side window, it rolled down. A Waymo operator's voice came on through a speaker.

“They said they would look into it,” he says. “They were really, really apologetic.”

Currently, cops in California can’t cite a car without a driver.

The law is [about to change](#).

Write to Katherine Bindley at katie.bindley@wsj.com

Appeared in the December 4, 2025, print edition as ‘Waymos Are Done Being Nice’.