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Self-Driving Bugaloo: How Ford Is Keeping Autonomous Car Sensors Squeaky Clean

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When was the last time you thought about how insects affect your driving?

Chances are you never have, since they don't make much of an impact unless a particularly large one gets smeared across the windshield of your car.

Well I do think about it — a lot. I find myself dedicating an unbelievable amount of time to thinking about these critters as my team at Ford helps make progress on its self-driving vehicle business. It turns out that insects pose a significant challenge to self-driving vehicles.

Over the last few years, Ford has been conducting some serious research into making sure our self-driving vehicles can always see the world around them, no matter what may try to get in the way. We've sprayed dirt and dust onto our self-driving vehicle sensors. We've showered LiDAR sensors with water to simulate rainfall. We created our own synthetic bird droppings and smeared it on camera lenses.

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