

Waymo's California dream come true

Despite its many hurdles, Waymo's robotaxi service is taking off in San Francisco.

People who are afraid of talkative Uber drivers, rejoice: Driverless taxi rides are one step closer to ubiquity. Waymo One, the ride-hailing service that employs self-driving white Jaguars, is now available to everyone in San Francisco.

San Francisco is the second city to go full Waymo, four years after the company opened operations to the general public in Phoenix, Arizona. Not to be confused with John Mulaney's soda-delivering robot friend, Saymo, Waymo was started 15 years ago as a project within Google's parent, Alphabet. Multiple tests and destroyed cars later, it stands out as a pioneer in the nascent robotaxi space.

And it could be coming to a city near you. Waymo currently offers limited service in Los Angeles and plans to start operating in the San Francisco of Texas—Austin—later this year.

Everyone's cool with this?

Waymo's success makes it almost easy to forget that it's had plenty of hiccups:

- As recently as last month, a probe by the US Highway Traffic Safety Administration discovered safety incidents relating to Waymo's cars.
- Waymo recalled software in all its cars earlier this month after one crashed into a telephone pole.
- In February, a San Francisco crowd set a Waymo car on fire.

And yet, Waymo is still cruising. The company said 300,000 people were on its San Francisco waitlist before it opened to the public. Waymo claims that its cars have driven riders over 3.8 million miles across SF as of April.

Its next goal...make money. As the company vies for a piece of the market dominated by Uber and Lyft, it hopes to find a way to be profitable and make back some of the billions that Google has spent to develop it.

Zoom out: Waymo is the future of the US robotaxi industry. Its closest competitor, GM's autonomous vehicle unit Cruise, had its licenses in California suspended in October after a series of collisions.