

Women In Automotive Interview Series

Part of Informa Tech Automotive Group's Summer Festival of Automotive.

In partnership with:



Meet Michelle Avery, Head of Automotive Industry & Autonomous Mobility, World Economic Forum

1. Why did you get involved in automotive?

I made a purposeful shift from banking to automotive strategy thanks to a dear friend who is a fellow economist and worked at Toyota. She recruited me!

2. What are you most excited about that you are working on right now?

I'm fortunate to work on many exciting endeavors. Right now, the work we are doing on inclusive mobility feels overwhelming, timely, late, and future looking at the same time. Helping to shine the spotlight on the mobility needs for our most vulnerable populations is a huge motivator for me. We are also working on the principles for Universal Basic Mobility which I know will have a global impact.

I'm also working on critical safety efforts, including developing scenario-based safety evaluations for highly automated driving systems. While AVs seem way out in the future, the fact is we need to be assessing the safety of these vehicles collaboratively during testing as the industry moves to commercialization. I am insanely passionate about efforts that can reduce vehicular fatalities and injuries.

3. How will your work impact the future of transportation?

Our work at The World Economic Forum and the work of the incredible team I lead is to ensure road transportation is safe, clean, and inclusive. We are working globally on these issues and my job is to make sure we are having direct, positive impact by collaborating with industry, governments, civil society, researchers and universities to drive solutions. We are tackling the hardest problems which require multi-stakeholder collaboration to solve. We are seeking solutions that can scale globally.

4. What do you think is the greatest challenge facing the autonomous vehicle industry?

Outside of technological and business model validity, it's lack of regulatory clarity. Highly automated driving systems must work and prove they offer enormous benefits over human operated systems, are more effective, efficient, and offer clear return on investment. And they need to be regulated in a way that does not stifle innovation, that creates a level playing field for industry, and provides transparency to citizens.



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5. What is the biggest opportunity in autotech right now?

To harness the technologies to ensure mobility is inclusive. There are many viable markets that are not being tapped right now by autotech in the field of mobility for elderly, for women, for rural communities. Investment and business development patterns are disproportionately in urban centers catering to an economically advantaged population. They are not the only ones in need of a mobility revolution! The working class, women, elderly and rural communities are in need of a mobility revolution and there are many opportunities within these segments to apply advances from technologies that comprise the fourth industrial revolution to the market.

6. How do you see today's global pandemic reshaping the AV industry?

The shift toward delivery of goods over movement of people and consolidation across the ecosystem was well prior to COVID-19 and the ensuing recessions. The trends are just speeding up! The business model for movement of goods, automation in industries with labor shortages and clear ROI for safety and efficiency remain highly viable. What has likely most changed is traditional automakers' and tier 1s' financial capacity to invest in AVs. The success of AVs requires technology and platform providers as well as traditional automotive ecosystem partners and this timeline is moving out a bit.

7. Any predictions you want to make for 2020/2021?

Consolidation will continue. Investments will continue. The issue of who owns the vehicle and manages the fleet of depreciating assets is a huge issue. I think we will begin to see some players carving out this space with unique capabilities and solutions.

I expect to see more solutions in movement of a lot of people – AVs in more traditional public transport areas – as public transport becomes more financially strained, creative solutions will evolve to get people back to work. AVs offer the potential to drive the cost of mobility down, and that is desperately needed.

I also expect issues of data sharing and liability will be raised over the next year. And while EVs are not AVs, they are obviously related. Issues with EV investments, including batteries, will continue to have spillover impact on AV development and roll out.

8. Why does diversity matter in this field? Anything in particular that you are doing to promote diversity in your company and/or our industry?

There are endless studies that prove diversity is crucial for success. The automotive and autonomous mobility space is no different. Women and people of color are underrepresented in our sector and that fact will continue to stifle innovation, breakthroughs, and success.

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The first step to solving a problem is to recognize you have a problem. I am not sure the industry has really recognized it has a problem. I think we are on step one, especially in areas related to core product. The work our team is doing on inclusivity will hopefully spill over into other key areas.

9. What advice do you have for rising women in this space?

You are not alone. And you are not crazy! There is systemic discrimination at all levels in the automotive and autonomous sector and sadly brutal misogyny still exists. Reach out and join with other women and allies. We have to partner and work together to make change. I believe it is possible, but it will not happen by accident. Find a place you love and you feel is worth fighting to make better. Choose your battles, as this will take a long time.

The mobility sector is hugely important, with a lot of exciting opportunities and enormous impact potential. My advice is stick with it!! Join us!!

Thanks, Michelle for taking the time to talk to us about your experience working in Automotive.

For more insightful intelligence, please visit the [Summer Festival of Automotive](#).