

BMW settles batch of cases over flaw claims

BMW has settled a civil action in a batch of cases brought over an alleged defect that caused some of its cars to suddenly lose power and stop.

Three of the cases were before Dublin District Court last year where the manufacturer was accused of negligence by motorists who bought different models of 2008-reg BMWs, all of which are alleged to have experienced timing chain failures.

More than 50 similar actions were in the offing against BMW, Dublin District Court heard last December.

An action by John McConville from Canal View, Clones Road, Monaghan Town, Co. Mona-

ghan was listed again yesterday. Mr McConville was among the group of motorists who initiated civil proceedings against the motor firm for €8,700 in damages.

He claimed that in 2011, significant damage was caused to his 2008-reg BMW X5-series car – which he had bought for €42,000 – when driving from Limerick to Dublin. He claimed the vehicle suddenly lost power and he had to take emergency measures.

He said a defective engine design had prevented inspection and maintenance of the timing chain and that his car

needed extensive repairs.

In July, BMW Automotive (Ireland) Ltd was ordered to hand over evidence by Dublin District Court after the action brought by the three motorists.

John O'Regan, counsel BMW Ireland, told Judge John Brennan there was ongoing disclosure and an affidavit has to be sworn by his client.

He said Mr McConville's could be put back for mention to a later date but a separate case brought by another plaintiff had been settled.

Another of the three cases was withdrawn last month.

Judge Brennan adjourned Mr McConville's case until November 15 next.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Our beautiful flaws are what make us human

IMAGINE a world in which you went to hospital and were treated by a robot. There would, of course, still be doctors, nurses and surgeons, but machines would operate on their patients. A Brave New World fantasy or an imminent reality? As it turns out, it is something just waiting to happen.

According to one eminent Irish physician I know, robots will play a pivotal role in medicine within 20 years. As they become more sophisticated, they shall undertake a whole host of tasks traditionally performed by human beings. Unlike us, robots don't suffer burn-out, get tired or shake in the middle of a procedure.

What's more, they can assimilate vastly more knowledge and can be programmed to do things of great delicacy and complexity. At a time when doctors and nurses are stressed and exhausted to the limit, artificial intelligence (AI) promises a safer medical environment. It also offers the prospect of a more efficient health service.

Who could possibly object to that? We all know how chronically congested our health service is and how overworked Irish medical professionals are. If AI could help solve those problems, why not embrace it as the way of the future?

Like me, I imagine many of you shaking your heads in despair and foreboding. Human beings have many flaws and weaknesses. Our long history contains much of which we cannot be proud.

And yet, for all our self-inflicted wounds and disasters, ours is a species that can have pride in its moral progress. Our advances in science have been matched by sublime leaps of the human spirit. Where once there was only cruelty and domination, now there is compassion, tolerance and love.

Lately, my sons have been watching Planet Of The Apes. Those movies told of a time when sophisticated apes subjugate the human population. Is this an allegory for what many eminent scientists – including the late Stephen Hawking – fear will happen when artificial intelligence becomes too powerful to control?

The fact that our middle son could not restrain his tears when viewing those movies, tells its own poignant story. The apes were engaged in a moral struggle regarding how to treat humans. Some desired endless suppression, while

others ought to coexist in peace.

For the most part, the apes had compassion, empathy and mercy. Somehow, they had morally evolved to the point where they could cry and care and love. There was still cruelty, but it was always balanced by sympathy.

Perhaps they may yet devise a computer chip containing all those vital emotions which make us human. Perhaps the machines that dominate our future will be possessed of something akin to the human heart. But when people like Stephen Hawking are predicting that full AI 'could spell the end of the human race', you have to be doubtful.

I am not saying we should deny ourselves the obvious benefits that machines may well bring to medicine or to other areas of our lives. Unquestionably, there are many things that AI can do far better than humans. However, doing something better is not the same as doing it with sensitivity, wisdom or compassion.

Surgeons may be fatigued and stressed, but they are, first and foremost, humans who have been conditioned by their kind. They live and think and feel as their patients do. They have felt pain, suffering, joy, friendship and love.

LIKE their patients, they are fully sensitive to our earthly predicament. They experience disaster as tragedy and can empathise with those for whom life has lost all meaning. And, even though they must guard against excessive empathy, they understand that, while unavoidable, death is not something that can be borne without intense sorrow.

Machines cannot mourn. They can't weep, and neither can they suffer. They can never know what it is like to face the darkness in the absence of light. Knowing that we will one day perish is what gives life meaning and purpose. We love today because tomorrow may not be ours. We sacrifice for others because we realise that, while we are strong, we are also immensely fragile.

To care for human beings without knowing how to love, mourn and laugh, is not to care for them at all. For all their flaws, surgeons understand just how precious human life is. They do so because they are mortal beings who fear and weep and pray for miracles just like the rest of us.

But what are we to a machine that will never know loss?

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—



Click&Go



€1 deposit with Aer Lingus flights

5 STAR ALGARVE

WINTER LUXURY

from

€299

pp

Dec/Jan from €299 pp

Feb/Mar from €319 pp

April from €399 pp

May from €429 pp

June from €499 pp

Real Marina Hotel & Spa | Olhao

5 STAR | BED & BREAKFAST

Price based on 2 people sharing includes:

✓ Return flights ✓ Transfers

✓ 7 nights hotel on bed & breakfast

Holidays are just a click away

Book today | 01902 6528 | clickandgo.com

Prices are 'from' prices, based on select departure dates from Dublin Price, per person & 2 sharing subject to availability. Prices are as specified. €1 deposit with Aer Lingus flights only. Visit clickandgo.com for our T&C's. Fully licensed and bonded by CAR (TA 0700). E&OE.