

Women In Automotive Interview Series

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

In partnership with:



Meet Alison Chaiken, Software Engineer, Aurora Innovation

1. Why did you get involved in automotive?

In 2013, I worked on Linux mobile phone software for Nokia when it became apparent that the company was going to switch to Windows Phone. The interesting part of mobile phone software felt done, so I wanted to find something new. In all of Nokia, there was one fellow who worked on automotive applications of Linux, which I decided would be a growth area. So far, so good!



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

I work on the “unsexy” part of autonomy products: the software that makes the system boot up to the point that the autonomy stack can run. I also work on applications that the autonomy stack needs to perform simple operations like opening files on storage devices or sending messages over the network. Undoubtedly those tasks sound boring to a lot of people, but we cannot have automation unless the computers on which the fancy AI applications run are super-stable and predictable.

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

Easily the biggest challenge is the current economic crisis, which is causing automakers to lose massive amounts of money due to decreased sales. Automotive autonomy projects may slow down due to reduced budgets. However, we shouldn't forget that autonomous vehicles include drones and ground delivery robots, plus military and commercial vehicles. These other applications will grow at the expense of automotive ones in the near term.

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

Given the actual growth in online sales and local delivery despite the horrible economy, the biggest opportunities in the short term lie in delivery and commercial vehicles.

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

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China's economy has resumed growing while the rest of the world is lagging. Consequently Chinese automakers and their suppliers will have an advantage in the next time period. In Europe and North America, the most progress and most public announcements in 2020/2021 will likely come from the non-automotive sectors, as mentioned above. We can also hope that government agencies around the world will clarify and extend their regulations so that companies can better prepare to comply.

6. Why does diversity matter in this field?

Diversity matters because transportation is both personal and local. No one needs convincing that different stakeholders in any society have different transportation needs, preferences and budgets. Products designed without consultation with a wide variety of groups will be disadvantaged in the marketplace.

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

Use first principles to identify what trends will be important going forward. And make your own choices rather than relying on those your colleagues and friends are making. Join societies like SAE, IEEE or ACM: they have great information, so actually read their publications! There are also great industry podcasts that provide accurate and valuable perspective and information on the space, so they represent a great way to learn more.. Consider opportunities working internationally or in non-automotive sectors in order to broaden your worldview.

Thanks, Alison 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](#).