



SMILE, you're on camera

Spurred on by the need for drivers to prove their innocence in "crash-for-cash" scams, dashcam video footage has become an internet phenomenon, showing (most of the time) how badly people drive. GAVIN MYERS takes a look at the basics of in-cab camera equipment

A representative from DashcamSA, which has been providing the South African market with high-quality dashcams since 2012, says that 2016 returned the largest growth in the local dashcam market – largely due to the popularity of social media.

The recent trend is due to an active effort by motorists to secure themselves and their vehicles in preparation for any incidents that may take place during their everyday travels. The trend among corporates and fleet owners is increasing, too.

"Corporates are always the first to understand the benefits of having dashcams in their vehicles. This is not only to protect the company, but the drivers as well," the company says.

These benefits include clear, concise and unedited footage of an incident to play back to determine the wrongful party, as well as to assist police, vehicle and medical insurance companies and the legal system with a complete evaluation of an incident.

"In the event of a hit-and-run accident, for example, it's possible that the driver would not take down any details in the panic of the moment; such as the fleeing vehicle's make, colour and number plate. However, all of those details will be available if recorded on camera."

Certain models of dashcams will display the speed at which the vehicle was travelling; which is helpful to show if any speed limits were broken moments before an impact.

Furthermore, there is a learning opportunity, as viewing footage of any incident can bring awareness to what the eye might miss. Dashcams with a GPS logger can also assist in viewing routes taken by drivers and this information can be used to decrease travel time or fuel costs.

"Drivers who are aware they are being recorded are more likely to drive more safely and obey the rules. This is most noticeable in company vehicles with a dashcam installed," says DashcamSA.

What features should a good-quality dashcam offer? It's not so much what one can see, but what's inside that counts... "A good quality dashcam should provide reliable loop recording and should be manufactured using only genuine parts and chipsets to ensure the longest lifespan of the unit. Poor-quality units often cannot handle the constant recording of footage and can have a lifespan of only a few weeks," notes DashcamSA.

Other features a good dashcam should include are: high definition video quality, G-sensor capability, date and time stamp, adequate storage space (it should accept a minimum 32 GB SD memory card), easy-to-use software and customisable settings. Additional features could include dual lenses, a rear-view camera or a GPS logger.

The final consideration is whether there are any legal implications to fitting a dashcam. The representative brings to light an article on businesstech.co.za in which Jeff Osborne, head of Gumtree Automotive and former CEO of the RMI, states that there is no law clarifying the validity or legality of dashcams in South Africa and, in general, one can legally record anything that happens on public roads.

He further states that the degree to which the video evidence will be allowed in court will depend on the discretion of the court.

"It's no secret that South Africa ranks as one of the most dangerous countries in which to drive. We hope to contribute to the safety of our roads as more people become aware that their actions, and those of others, are being recorded..." **F**