

Back in 2007, I was invited to Sibiu, a little town in Romania on the eastern edge of Europe. I was asked to contribute to an exhibition about 'mobility'. The idea was to have artists working in Sibiu where they could make interactive works on the spot, inspired by the local setting.

I was excited, as I hadn't been in Romania before. So there I went, for a week, constructing a racing urinal on wheels and a remote controlled walking ladder. Neither piece had anything to do with Sibiu but I had fun making them! And finally, on the day of the opening, I came up with a piece, which was related to the local car driving culture:

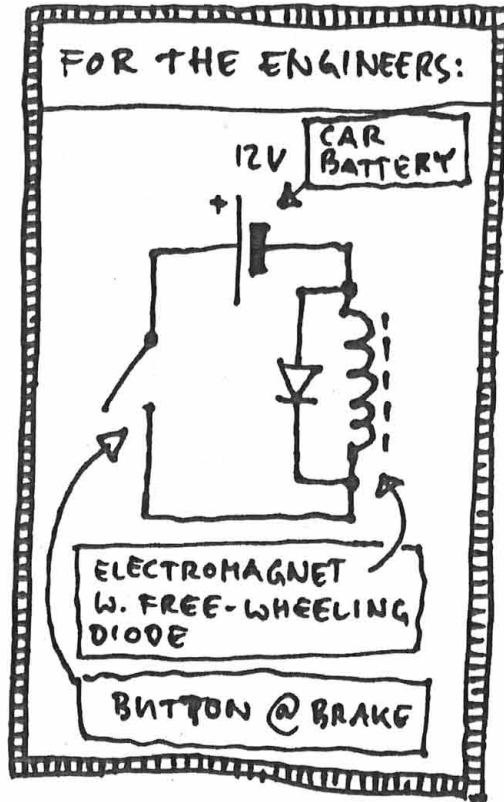
AUTOHONK

[by Niklas Roy]

While in Romania, I observed that drivers behave differently than in Germany, where I come from. In addition to speed, the most noticeable difference was excessive honking. Not only in situations where the traffic demanded it, but also for fun. Honking at women just to get their attention was nothing exceptional in Romania. It seemed like anyone who could afford a car gained additional power with it, which obviously had to be shown with pride, for example, by honking a lot.

As honking was such an integral part of the local driving culture, something had to be done with it. This led me to the idea of automatic honking, something where the driver would not need to think of it, but it would happen in the natural flow of driving. So I connected the honk to the car's brake, as any situation, which requires a driver to brake must be also suitable for some honking.





The setup of the Autohonk was simple: I attached a 12V electromagnet to the steering wheel of the curator's Mercedes with tie wraps and gaffa tape. The magnet's moving iron core pushed the button of the car horn when powered up, and a button made of two sheets of metal separated by layers of tape was glued on the brake pedal. Finally, switch and electromagnet were connected to the car's 12V battery via the cigarette igniter. That was it. And even though all the cable connections caused quite a mess during steering, the setup worked fine.

So we went for a ride with the curator, excited to try out the improved honk. Touring around Sibiu, I filmed the curator driving, honking and braking, looking enthusiastically at the reactions of the pedestrians and the other drivers. But they were completely ignorant – even if the curator and me found the honking rather embarrassing. It seemed that no one outside our car recognized the ingenious brake-honk connection.

But we still had the exhibition, so I dismantled the Autohonk in order to show it in the gallery together with the video of our ride. The visitors in the opening were totally excited about the racing urinal. It was the hit of the show. And no one cared about the Autohonk.

[The author makes strange things with electronics, mechanics and code. The results of his works are often shown in art exhibitions. He is based in Berlin but works and exhibits worldwide. You can find more about him on his website www.niklasroy.com. There, you can also watch the Autohonk video from which the still images are taken.]