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Wanted: Surveillance

By Kevin O'Flynn

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First the back story, and then to catch a car from Kiev to Moscow in eight minutes.

The other day, there were three journalists — two British — in the car heading back from Vorobyovy Gory, but surprisingly the only one secretly recording anything was the young driver of the Ford.

It was his mini video camera that filmed every meter of the journey.

He wasn't purposefully filming surreptitiously, for the camera, like the driver, was looking out at the road. It was strapped via a metal grip to the rear-view mirror in plain view, so plain that it was almost invisible.

At first glance it looked like a satellite navigation device for the driver who likes to be told where to go, or perhaps a mini version of the DVD player now beloved of the type of taxi driver so confident he needs only to keep one eye on the road.

"Is that recording?" came the question after 10 seconds of staring at the device.

“Uh-huh,” affirmed the driver. Looking closer, the seconds could be seen flickering past on the digital screen as the car moved along the Boulevard Ring.

“I record every journey I go on so if there is an accident, I have proof of what exactly happened,” he said.

“Do you hang it around your neck and film when you go walking, too?” I asked. “You know, just in case.”

No, he said, he didn’t.

I later learned that one Moscow Times employee has his own camera for the same reason so as to prove his innocence if an accident happens. If you are guilty you don’t have to incriminate yourself. Nevertheless, it still seems a strange idea to volunteer yourself as a voluntary CCTV camera.

Insurance wasn’t the only reason young Ford was recording, for he also plays with the resultant videos by turning them into sped-up versions, which after adding a soundtrack he then posts on YouTube where he said he was relatively popular.

That led to an eight-minute Kiev-to-Moscow trip. The 900-kilometer journey was filmed by a like-minded driver, and it is quite hypnotic — a hyperactive Google View, with delays for Russian-Ukrainian customs and Moscow traffic jams for three out of the total eight minutes — but also beautiful, as the birch trees crowd in on the mostly lonely roads between the two cities.

There are numerous other videos that take you around the Moscow center with Mr. Ford and an accompanying beat, or the mother of them all: a view of a drive from Moscow to Vladivostok. There is a 14-minute version — which is nothing much more than a blur especially with the explicit soundtrack — or the more sedate seven-hour version.

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