

## Call for safety feature in new cars

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A campaign to convert motorists to a safety feature which could cut car accidents in Europe by one fifth is being launched.

The European Commission says Electronic Stability Control (ESC) is the most promising car safety technology currently on the market - but too few drivers know about the benefits.

The event in Rome - with a video endorsement from racing driver Michael Schumacher - is designed to increase awareness and encourage manufacturers to add ESC to the standard features of their models.

ESC senses when the driver loses control and automatically applies the brakes to individual wheels to help stability and avoid skidding. The Commission says it can cut the risk of accidents by up to 20%, especially in wet or icy conditions.

And with loss of control recognised as the main cause of car crashes involving serious injury or death, the system could help cut significantly the 40,000 road deaths of one million road accident injuries on European roads every year.

The Choose ESC! campaign at the Bridgestone European testing ground near Rome includes demonstrations comparing the performance of a car with and without the system engaged.

A new EU-wide survey by the European New Car Assessment Programme will also be released, revealing the current availability of ESC on new cars. It shows that 42% of new cars are ESC-equipped - but they are mostly luxury models and not small family cars.

The Commission is already planning to make ESC installation compulsory in all new passenger cars by 2012, but in the meantime wants motorists to opt for the system because of its proven safety record.

"The benefits of ESC are undisputed," said EU Enterprise and Industry Policy Commissioner Gunter Verheugen. "We are preparing the obligatory installation of ESC into new passenger cars via international harmonisation. Until it becomes mandatory, the voluntary choice of ESC is more than welcome."

Max Mosley, president of the International Automobile Federation, said: "There is no doubt that ESC could contribute significantly to the European Union's goal to halve the number of road traffic fatalities by 2010. But to achieve this, much more needs to be done to inform the consumer about why they must choose ESC when buying a new car."