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**RAC Foundation and FIA call for action on Electronic Stability Control**

9 May 2007

Many new cars are being sold in the UK with lower levels of safety equipment fitted as standard than cars sold in Latvia and Lithuania, according to new figures released by the RAC Foundation.

Road crashes could be reduced by more than 20 per cent, especially in wet or icy conditions, by cars being fitted with Electronic Stability Control (ESC), yet just 55% of new cars sold in the UK fit ESC as standard as opposed to 76% in Denmark, and 65% in Latvia and Lithuania.

In the UK it is estimated that if 90% of cars were fitted with ESC it would save 400 lives and prevent 3,000 serious injuries each year (Thatcham). Europe wide it could save 4,000 lives and 100,000 serious accidents.

The Europe wide 'Choose ESC!' campaign will be launched at the Bridgestone European Testing ground near Rome today. The campaign, lead by the FIA Foundation, under the patronage of European Commissioner Viviane Reding and FIA President Max Mosley, aims to raise awareness of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and increase the take-up of this life-saving technology.

ESC should feature high on the shopping list of priorities when choosing a new car according to the RAC Foundation and drivers should be alerted to developments in technology which will help to prevent a collision.

The Foundation recommends that motorists ensure their next car is fitted with a stability control system. These systems dramatically reduce the chances of being involved in an accident by helping drivers to maintain control of their vehicles. If a driver has misjudged a corner or suddenly swerves to avoid an obstacle, stability control can help avoid a skid and can turn an accident into a near miss.

Stability control evolved from other technologies such as traction control and anti-lock brakes. This tried and tested technology, along with some additional sensors, feeds information to a computerised control unit. The signals are continuously monitored to determine whether or not the vehicle is losing control. If a deviation from the intended course is detected, the control unit applies a small amount of braking to whichever wheel is needed to help stabilize the course of the vehicle. Some systems also adjust the power output of the engine to help further. This is all done by the control unit which reacts faster than even the best driver could manage. The driver may not know that the system has intervened.

Studies have shown that cars fitted with Stability Control are less involved in certain types of accidents than those without. In Sweden, an overall reduction of 22% has been detected, rising to 32% just in wet conditions, and a study in Japan has suggested a decrease in accident involvement of some 30 to 35 percent. American and German studies have shown similar positive results.

On all cars sold in the UK, 55% have ESC as standard, 22% as an option and on 23% it is not available.

This compares to Denmark which offers ESC as standard on 75% of cars, an option on 8% and not available on 16%. In Latvia the figures are 65%, 16%, 19%. Ireland has the lowest proportion of cars with ESC should as standard with just 52%, 18% as an option and on 30% of cars it is not available.

On superminis sold in the UK, 8% have ESC as standard, 41% as an option and on 51% it is not available.

Edmund King, executive director of the RAC Foundation said: "The safest car on the road is the one which does not get involved in accidents. Driving carefully and attentively is perhaps the best way to reduce the chances of

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carefully and attentively is perhaps the best way to reduce the chances of being in a crash but technology can play an important role, too. That is why Electronic Stability Control should be standard on more cars in the UK and Ireland.

"It seems odd that more cars sold in parts of Eastern Europe have these safety features fitted as standard than cars in the UK. We are particularly concerned that ESC is not available in over half of all super-minis bought in the UK. These smaller cars tend to be bought by the more vulnerable younger drivers who arguably need this protection most."

FIA President Max Mosley, 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."

New data released by the FIA reveals for the first time that in 2007 use of Electronic Stability Control will be higher in North America than in Europe. The FIA also show that the USA, unlike the European Union, is heading for 100% use of this life saving technology which was invented in Europe. In response the FIA is demanding urgent action "to ensure that ESC, Europe's number one 'eSafety' system, can be used to the full saving lives on our roads".

In a letter sent today to Wolfgang Tiefensee (President of the EU Transport Council) and Gunther Verheugen, (Commissioner for Enterprise & Industry) the FIA urges the EU to follow the decisive action taken by the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in support of ESC. The letter, signed by FIA President Max Mosley, Deputy President Franco Lucchesi, and FIA Region 1 President Werner Kraus, warn that "by 2010, the year in which the EU aims to reduce road traffic fatalities by half, the use of ESC in the NAFTA area will have reached 82% of new vehicles whilst in the EU it will amount to only 61%".

At the moment ESC is available usually as standard in the luxury end of the car market. It is either just an option or not even available in smaller car classes. As a result the largest sector of the vehicle fleet, that would benefit the most from the safety benefits of ESC, is being denied this life saving technology. The FIA Presidents argue, "fiscal incentives, perhaps targeted only at these smaller vehicle classes would be overwhelmingly cost effective" and help to "ensure that Europe retakes the leadership on ESC deployment and 'eSafety' systems".

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