

Easier Motoring

8 May 2007

EU Commission, FIA, and Euro NCAP recommend: No car without ESP

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Every car should be routinely equipped with the Electronic Stability Program (ESP), or Electronic Stability Control as it is usually called by traffic experts. This was the clear message at the launch event for the "Choose ESC!" campaign, held today (8 May 2007), at the Bridgestone testing centre in Aprilia, near Rome.

EU Commissioner Viviane Reding and FIA (international automobile federation) President Max Mosley were the patrons of the event, which was visited by some 120 representatives from the industry, associations and the media. The objective of "Choose ESC!" is to increase the proportion of new vehicles equipped with ESP. The campaigners warn of the negative effects of slow proliferation of ESP. Slow proliferation would, they said, jeopardise attainment of the EU's target of halving the number of road deaths from its 2001 level to 25,000 by the year 2010.

Michael Schumacher is one of the campaign's prominent supporters. In a video message, the former Grand Prix world champion extolled the benefits of ESP. "You never know when a crash might happen so don't take chances with the lives of you or your family. Choose ESP!" was the clear message from one of the world's best drivers.

Developed and launched by Bosch in 1995, this active driving safety system is described by experts as the most significant addition to driving safety since the introduction of the seat belt.

To quote Herbert Hemming, president of the Bosch Chassis Systems Control division, "We are proud that ESP can deliver such a valuable contribution to road safety, both in Europe and worldwide. However, this can only happen if the system is installed in as many vehicles as possible. This is why ESP communication has been one of our marketing tasks for many years now."

Many international studies demonstrate that skidding is the root cause of at least 40 per cent of all fatal traffic accidents. According to these studies, ESP can reduce the risk of skidding by as much as 80 per cent. A new study of the social costs of traffic accidents from the University of Cologne, presented at the event, concludes that if ESP were introduced across the board, 4,000 lives could be saved and 100,000 injuries prevented in Europe alone. Moreover, the study confirms that the costs of such a universal introduction of ESP would be significantly lower than the current level of costs arising as a consequence of accidents that could be prevented by ESP. At present, only 42 per cent of all newly registered cars in the EU are equipped with ESP. Especially compact cars, and midsize models in some countries, are still not equipped with ESP.

A detailed study by the vehicle safety experts of the European New Car Assessment Programme (Euro NCAP) provides information about the vehicle manufacturers that offer the Electronic Stability Program as an option, and in which models. Convinced of the benefits of ESP, they urge manufacturers to install ESP as standard equipment in all their vehicles. As one representative pointed out, it would be inconceivable if seat belts were only available for an extra charge, or exclusively in expensive cars.

Apart from the availability of the safety system, awareness of its benefits is the second key condition for its widest possible dissemination. However, the

Eurobarometer study conducted by the European Commission shows that drivers' awareness of ESP is non-existent or poor, and that drivers do not even consider choosing ESP as an option. Once the benefits of the system have been explained to them, however, 80 per cent would opt for the system in their next car, said EU Commissioner Viviane Reding, speaking at the event.

Max Mosley, President of the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile), pleaded for more political backing. Although ESP was invented in Europe, and European automakers were the first to install the system, he pointed out that the proportion of cars fitted with the system was set to grow faster in the US over the next few years thanks to legislation adopted there.