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Calls for EU to speed up ESC process

TIM O'BRIEN

IRELAND MUST have Electronic Stability Control (ESC) fitted on all new cars by 2012, but moves are afoot at a European level to bring the date forward, it has emerged.

The stability control feature, which helps drivers to maintain control of their vehicles if they have to suddenly swerve, can turn a potential crash into a near miss.

Along with additional sensors, ESC 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 stabilise the vehicle. Some systems also adjust the power output of the engine.

Studies in Europe and the US show that ESC can reduce passenger car single-vehicle crashes by as much as 35 per cent and yet the system is available on less than half of vehicles currently sold in Europe.

While some cars sold here already have ESC fitted, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), which represents the interests of motoring organisations and motor car users throughout the world, has called on the EU to provide financial incentives to car companies who install it in advance of the deadline.

FIA president Max Mosley recently reminded members of the European Commission they had promised to speed up the "widest availability" of ESC as a standard item of equipment on all cars sold in Europe.

According to Mr Mosley: "ESC could save 4,000 lives in Europe every year.

"We cannot afford any further delay if the goal of fitting ESC on all new vehicles by 2012 is to be achieved. With regulations being prepared on a global level, Europe must not fall behind the rest of the world in the push for safer vehicles," he said.

"Fiscal incentives have already been used by governments to promote environmental technologies and there is no reason why a similar approach could not be used to promote a life-saving technology like ESC," he said.

Many firms already fit such systems as standard, though they use a variety of abbreviations depending on the company, from dynamic stability control (DSC) to active stability response (ASR), among others. The key features of such systems are traction control and stability control.

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