

Preventing accidents – a smart approach

Electronic Stability Control could help cut the number of deaths on European roads. **Tim King** reports

IN LESS than two weeks' time, leading figures from the European car industry and Viviane Reding, the European commissioner for the information society, will attend the launch of an awareness campaign for Electronic Stability Control (ESC).

Its advocates claim that ESC could contribute significantly to the EU's declared aim of halving the number of road deaths by 2010. Indeed, they point out, because ESC prevents accidents happening, it can also prevent a significant number of injuries – both to pedestrians and motorists.

The introduction of ESC was one of six measures that the CARS 21 high-level group, which looked at the future of the European car industry, declared should be included in a future package of road safety measures.

But David Ward argues that Europe has been delaying on ESC unnecessarily. He is director-general of the FIA Foundation for the Automobile and Society, which is an offshoot of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and campaigns on road safety,

environmental protection and sustainable mobility, and is chairing the eSafetyAware campaign to increase public sensitivity to ESC.

The ESC technology, Ward points out, was developed in Europe, but the US has taken it up more enthusiastically. In part this is because the US market has more sports utility vehicles,

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more jeeps and station wagons, so stability is a greater issue.

Nevertheless it is striking that the US has been swifter to resort to regulation. The US National Highway Safety Administration has published a draft rule requiring all US light vehicles to be equipped by ESC by 2011.

Sigrid de Vries of Acea, the European carmakers' association, argues that carmakers cannot be

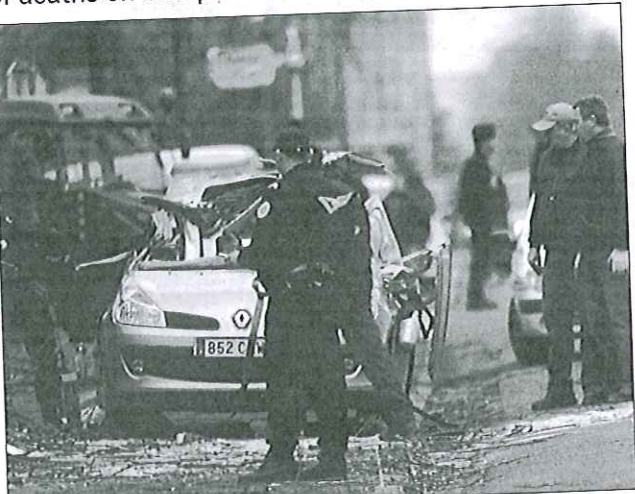
expected to put every safety feature in every model. Customers can decide for themselves about safety features. The manufacturers, she says, respond to demand.

But Ward counters that ESC is not available either as an option or as a standard on some models – and that arguably it is drivers of smaller, lighter, less protected cars, who need ESC more.

"Below large family cars, it is incredibly hard to get it in some makes," he says.

The market, he says, is not an adequate mechanism for introducing safety measures. ABS took 30 years to penetrate the vehicle fleet.

The Commission's response, published in February, to the final report of the CARS 21 group which included carmakers, the Commission, MEPs, member states and non-governmental organisations, said that: "Between 2007 and 2009, the Commission will assess the opportunity to come forward with proposals to...make the inclusion of the Electronic Stability Control mandatory starting with heavy-duty vehicles and followed by



Electronic Stability Control could help prevent serious accidents and save lives/REUTERS

passenger cars and light-duty vehicles as soon as a test method has been developed."

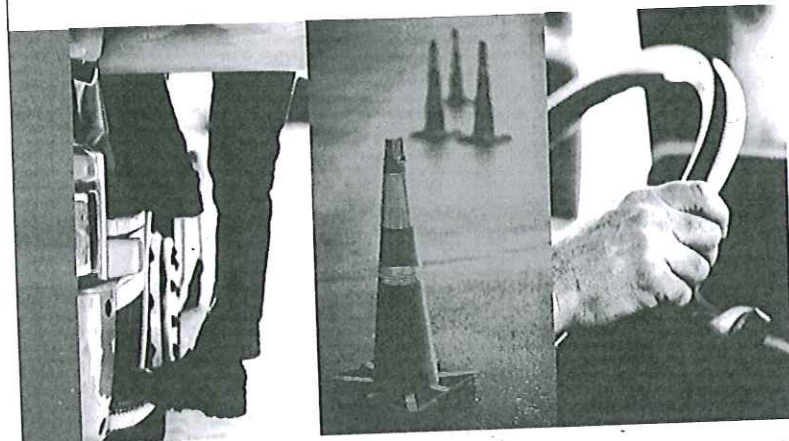
Max Mosley of the FIA, who pressed in the CARS 21 discussions for greater take-up of ESC, wrote last year to three European commissioners involved with the car industry – Jacques Barrot for transport, Günter Verheugen for enterprise and industry, and Viviane Reding for the information society – urging the

Commission to invite carmakers to agree to fit ESC in all cars from 2011.

Last month (7 March) Verheugen wrote back, declaring that: "Whatever the regulatory regime, I am committed to propose the obligatory introduction of ESC for passenger cars in 2007."

The ESC example makes clear that, despite all the concerns about regulatory burden on the car industry, which gave rise to the CARS 21

discussions, the EU is not about to give the car industry a free hand. The politicians and the lobbyists will continue to make regulatory demands of carmakers, whether on environmental or safety grounds. In the case of ESC though, it seems that European carmakers will not be put at a competitive disadvantage. A global standard will be developed, to be observed by the US, European and Japanese markets.



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