

PRESS RELEASE

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Life-saving technology ESC not a priority for European car dealers

Lack of information and high prices drive consumers away from ESC

A new mystery-shopping survey led by EuroTest (the European consumer protection test programme) funded by the FIA Foundation reveals Electronic Stability Control (ESC) is not only poorly promoted at car dealerships across Europe (with less than one in two sales people recommending ESC to new car-buyers) but also that consumers when wishing to buy ESC, are faced with wide-range prices across Europe. Dealerships were found to lack information about ESC, sales people appeared confused about the benefits of the system and reluctant to sell the system and dealerships offered a wide range of prices for ESC that varied in terms of brand and country.

EuroTest inspections were carried out at 500 car dealers in five cities in ten European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, the Netherlands and UK). In order to obtain manufacturer-specific findings, ten car manufacturers were tested: Citroën, Fiat, Ford, Honda, Mazda, Opel, Peugeot, Renault, Toyota and Volkswagen. The inspections revealed that in most cases dealership showrooms did not have any specific advertising or comprehensive documentation on ESC. Among the sales people polled, knowledge of ESC was found to be rather superficial and many gave a poor demonstration of their knowledge. In some cases not only sales people were reluctant to sell the life-saving system but they also expressed quite outrageous comments on ESC: "ESC is really only a very special kind of extra" (Slovenia), "It is sold too rarely, there's no reason to additionally advertise it" (Belgium) or "Customers assume that the car will not be involved in the type of accidents where ESC would be needed." (UK).

Remarkably the survey reports very few differences between manufacturers in terms of information provided. Differences between the individual countries were more noticeable: in Germany the sales people in all dealerships tested offered more comprehensive information while France and Italy ranked last.

When questioned on why they are not pushing ESC, car dealers claimed that "customers are more interested in their wallets than in ESC". ESC as an option dramatically increases the price of a small car and in addition is frequently only available as part of a more comprehensive extras package. All dealers reported that ESC was rarely requested or bought by typical buyers of small cars. For this reason ESC is not being recommended in the first place. Dealers also alleged that customers very

rarely ask about ESC. Demand for ESC is mostly found in the case of bigger cars for which ESC is often offered already as a standard feature.

EuroTest also found that the additional cost consumers have to pay for ESC when offered as an option varies highly across Europe and the different brands. Here is what consumers are faced with:

VW Polo	Germany: 420 Euro	France: 808 Euro
Peugeot 207	UK: 250 Euro	Netherlands: 680 Euro
Fiat Punto	Italy: 200 Euro	Netherlands: 695 Euro
Opel Corsa	Germany: 360 Euro	Netherlands: 750 Euro
Ford Fiesta	Germany: 400 Euro	Netherlands: 700 Euro

Apparently in some countries the wallet of the importers or dealerships is more important than the safety of customers.

“The lack of promotion and high prices of ESC when offered as an option, has a negative effect on the improvement of drivers’ safety” said Wil Botman Director General of the FIA European Bureau. “ESC is the second-most important life saver in a car. It is estimated to save 4000 lives per year in Europe (10% of the road fatalities). That is why the FIA European Bureau is strongly in favour of the Commission’s proposal to have ESC mandatory fitted as a standard on all new cars.” At the moment ESC is often being offered as a standard feature in luxury cars, but only offered as an option or not available at all with smaller cars. This is very worrying since small cars are driven mostly by young novice drivers or as a second car by mothers with children.

Despite car dealerships not promoting ESC as they could, European decision-makers acknowledge ESC’s value: the European Commission is committed towards the reduction of road fatalities to 25,000 by 2010 and to reach this goal it aims at having all new cars in Europe fitted with ESC by 2012. A new EC proposal for a Regulation on the general safety of motor vehicles will lay down harmonised rules on the construction of motor vehicles aiming at enhancing the safety and among its measures it will require mandatory fitting of ESC for all new cars in Europe from 2012.

Moreover the EC and FIA endorse the pan-European campaign to promote ESC – “Choose ESC!” which aims at providing the necessary information to consumers, especially to new car buyers. In 2006 the EC’s Eurobarometer study already concluded that over 80% of drivers who are explained about ESC want it fitted in their next car. But with car dealerships not providing the right information or no information at all, drivers will remain unaware or have a vague idea of what ESC is about.

For more information about the EuroTest study “ESC in Car Sales” visit www.eurotestmobility.com

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Notes to editors

1. The survey “ESC in Car sales” aiming at evaluating the quality of information and advice provided by car dealerships in Europe was conducted within the framework of the international EuroTest programme and under the leadership of Germany’s automobile club ADAC who was responsible for the performance and methodological management of the test. A total of 18 motoring clubs in 17 European Countries take part in EuroTest 2008: AA (UK), ACI (Italy), ACL (Luxembourg), ACP (Portugal), ADAC (Germany), AL (Finland), AMZS (Slovenia), ANWB (the Netherlands), FDM (Denmark), AC (France), HAK (Croatia), M (Sweden), NAF (Norway), OAMTC (Austria), RACC (Spain), RACE (Spain), Touring (Belgium) and TCS (Switzerland). Together with the FIA in Brussels, these automobile clubs represent some 34 million road users in Europe.
2. To know more about the “Choose ESC!” campaign visit: <http://www.chooseesc.eu>
3. For more information on the EC’s Eurobarometer studies:
 “Use of Intelligent Systems in Vehicles”:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_267_en.pdf
 “User’s attitudes towards electronic active safety systems in Vehicles”:
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/esafety/doc/eurobarometer/i_car_survey_qual_e_n.pdf

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