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Still too few small cars with ESP

2 July 2008

The number of vehicles equipped with the ESP electronic stability program rose again in 2007. Last year, the share of newly registered passenger cars in Europe equipped with this anti-skid system passed the 50 percent mark for the first time – an increase of seven percentage points.

Robert Bosch GmbH, which gathers these statistics every year, expects this figure to continue to rise in the years to come. "Worldwide, just under every third new vehicle is equipped with ESP at present – by 2012, this will be every second vehicle," said Herbert Hemming, executive vice president of the Bosch Chassis Systems Control division, at an event organized by the "Choose ESC!" information campaign in Brussels on July 1. What the statistics also show, however, is that the share of small and mini vehicles equipped with ESP remains very low. In the five largest European markets (Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and the U.K.), for example, only 17 percent of newly registered vehicles in these classes had ESP on board.

The patrons of the "Choose ESC!" campaign are EU Commissioner Vivianne Reding and the FIA, the international umbrella organization of automobile associations. The initiative has set itself the goal of using information campaigns to persuade drivers to ask for ESP when purchasing a new car. The automobile association representatives and traffic experts attending the Brussels event therefore support the EU Commission's proposal to mandate ESP for all new cars in the European Union: from 2012 for all new models, and from 2014 for all new vehicles. Bosch, which developed this active safety system, has supported this campaign since its launch last year. ESC stands for electronic stability control, and is the synonym international experts use for ESP.


The worldwide increase in the number of vehicles equipped with ESP is helped by very positive developments in the U.S. and Australia. In Europe, the share of vehicles fitted with ESP grew in every country, and especially strongly in Italy and Spain, with each country recording a seven percentage-point increase, to 42 percent and 57 percent respectively. The 79 percent figure recorded in Germany was two percentage points higher than in 2006.

Stagnation in the small-car segment

ESP fitment rates in new cars in the small and mini segments remain a white spot. In this segment, the share of vehicles featuring ESP in the five largest European markets was just 17 percent in 2007 – yet these vehicles make up 44 percent of the market. "Only roughly one-fifth of the vehicles actually on Europe's roads was equipped with ESP in 2007. To further increase the overall ESP share as quickly as possible, this technology has to be installed more in small cars as well," says Hemming. For this reason, the experts called for immediate exploitation of ESP's additional safety potential in these vehicle classes, instead of waiting for EU legislation to be passed. This was all the more important, they said, because accident research conducted by the ADAC had shown that such vehicles were frequently driven by novices, and thus far more likely to be involved in serious accidents.

The Bosch statistics also show that customers who buy ESP do so nearly exclusively because it is offered as standard equipment. In other words, the number of customers buying this system as an extra is still very small. According to the latest market survey by Euro NCAP (European New Car Assessment Program), ESP is available more and more frequently in small cars, but usually still as an option. The German automobile association ADAC also sees room for improvement when dealers advise potential customers. The "Eurotest" study carried out jointly with other European automobile associations in 2008 shows that more than half of the 500 anonymously tested European car dealers either failed to mention ESP as an option at all, or gave it insufficient attention, and provided no explanation of its benefits. Since 2004, Bosch has been working to reverse this trend with its ESPerience training program. In collaboration with automakers, the company has so far explained the functionality and

automakers, the company has so far explained the functionality and benefits of ESP to some 90,000 dealers worldwide.

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