

Fleets say: make a standard fit

Fleets say electronic stability control (ESC) should be standard-fit on all new cars – once they are told of its life-saving benefits, writes ASHLEY MARTIN

THE majority of fleet decision-makers say life-saving electronic stability control (ESC) should be a standard feature on all new cars.

The verdict came after Bosch, which invented the technology, explained the benefits and functions of the anti-skid equipment to fleet decision-makers – a third of whom had never heard of ESC and more than half were unaware of its potential.

Worryingly, said Bosch, two-thirds of fleet decision-makers claimed the benefits of ESC had not been brought to their attention when they last reviewed company car choice lists with their manufacturing or leasing suppliers.

Bosch, which with RoadSafe, ACFO (Association of Car Fleet Operators) and eSafety Aware! – the organisation behind a Europe-wide ‘Choose ESC!’ campaign – has conducted a survey into ESC and the UK fleet market, believes this lack of awareness is behind less than one in five fleet decision-makers specifying the equipment as a standard fit on company vehicles (*RoadSafe: spring 2008*).

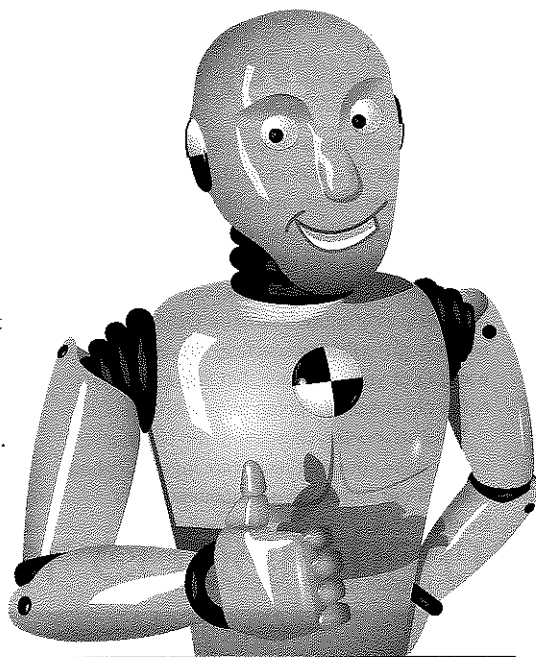
Showrooms

Almost half of all new cars in UK showrooms have ESC fitted as standard and the European Commission plans to make its fitment mandatory on new cars from 2012 (see page xx). But, Thatcham – the Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre – and the European New Car Assessment Programme have each called on manufacturers to make ESC standard to cut the risk of road crashes.

A Thatcham spokeswoman said: “Of those models that did not offer ESC as standard in 2006 and were updated or facelifted over the last year, around half have not had their level of ESC fitment increased, despite the opportunity to fit this essential safety technology.”

In the interim, a survey of 215 fleet decision-makers collectively managing more than 77,000 cars and vans revealed that a major education campaign needs to be undertaken by pro-ESC campaigners if more company cars and vans are to be acquired with ESC as standard.

After the benefits and functions of ESC,



CHOOSE ESC!

which is also known as ESP (electronic stability programme), DSC (dynamic stability control), VSA (vehicle stability assist) and VSC (vehicle stability control), were explained to fleet managers, 75% of them said they were convinced of its added value and would now take it into consideration to have it fitted to all their new company vehicles.

Standard

And almost 90% of fleet chiefs said ESC should be standard equipment from car manufacturers with many blaming the motor industry for their own lack of knowledge on the technology’s ability to reduce serious road crashes and save lives.

It could be that marketplace confusion over the technology’s name is adversely impacting on take-up. David Ward, who is leading the Choose ESC! Campaign, said: “When ESC becomes mandatory it would be in the best interests of the automotive industry to agree a common name for this technology and indeed for all generic technology in the future.”

Vehicle manufacturers and their sales networks, along with leasing and fleet management companies are among the primary sources of information on vehicle safety systems and duty of care – relied on for information by 92% and 43% of fleet decision-makers respectively according to the survey. This led Bosch to claim that ‘these players have a high responsibility of providing relevant information about safety systems such as ESC’.

Technology

A spokesman for the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said: “Vehicle technology is only part of the answer. We need to focus on driving abilities, road design, enforcement and traffic management. The motor industry is committed to improving safety – investing millions of pounds in passive safety systems which protect occupants and pedestrians involved in accidents and also in active systems like ESC, which are designed to prevent a collision from happening.

“Government figures for both occupant and pedestrian fatalities have fallen significantly in the past decade. This is a clear indication that investment in active and passive safety is benefiting all road users.

“ESC is being fitted to more and more vehicles, both as standard and as an optional extra. Last year, around 55% of new cars had it fitted as standard, with a further 22% carrying it as an option. There is an element of consumer choice to be considered here, balanced against cost – and technology inevitably cascades from larger to smaller vehicles, resulting in a low cost option. If fiscal incentives are put in place – for example Denmark has a high take up due

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to tax incentives – consumers will make it even more popular.”

Research by the Department for Transport has already suggested that ESC-equipped vehicles are 25% less likely to be involved in a fatal crash than those without the technology. That equates to 380 fewer fatalities and 7,800 less injuries a year.

Meanwhile, although it is true to say that technology typically filters down from larger vehicles to smaller vehicles where profit margins are tighter, Suzuki has made it company policy to introduce ESC as standard on all new models and model facelifts. The majority of its vehicles cost less than £13,000 on-the-road.

Expectations

In addition, fleet decision-makers have high expectations towards their leasing companies to disseminate information to them with more than a third believing that their chosen supplier does not provide sufficient advice on vehicle safety.

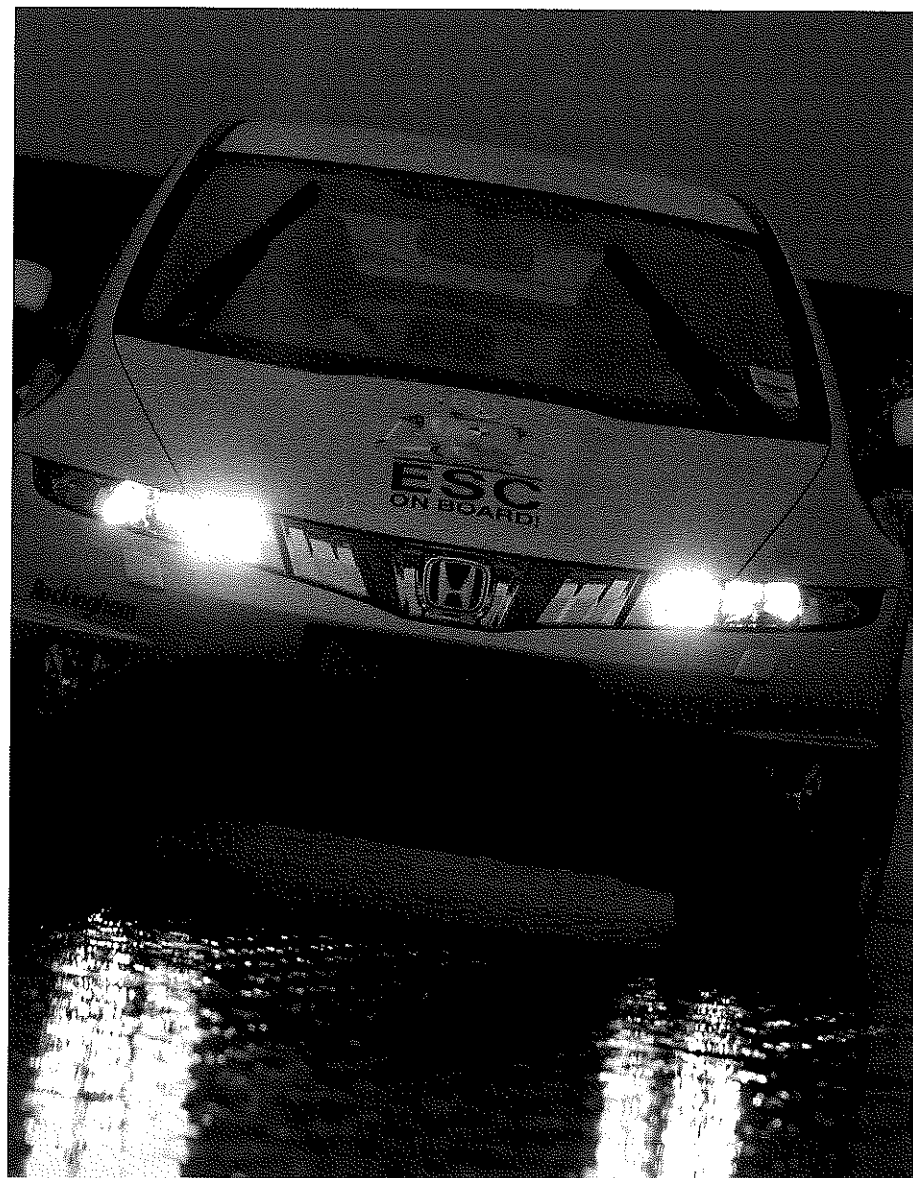
However, John Lewis, director general of the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association, commenting on the role of the leasing sector in promoting the safety-focused technology, said: “While ESC is a welcome addition to the driver aids on an increasing number of new vehicles it cannot take the place of an informed and enforced company driving policy nor driver training.

“With the plethora of modern safety devices now fitted to cars, both active and passive such as comprehensive airbag systems, seat belt pre-tensioners, anti submarine seats, ABS, etc. there can be a tendency for drivers to feel immortal.

“Yes, ESC may help to provide an escape from some extreme situations, but it is better by far for drivers never to need to use it by

driving in a way that is appropriate to the road and traffic conditions. So, have it fitted where available as part of an informed safety policy but make sure that the policy advocates safe driving as its number one criteria.”

Last year, both ALD Automotive and



Bank of Scotland Vehicle Finance said they actively encouraged their customers to choose vehicles equipped with ESC. In the latter's case this contributed to Cambridge-based Napp Pharmaceuticals making ESC mandatory on all its 340-strong company car fleet (*RoadSafe: summer 2007*).

The survey found that 19% of fleets

The survey also found that:

- More than 80% of fleets do not specify ESC as compulsory equipment within their own company vehicle policy
- Fleet decision-makers site vehicle reliability (94%), safety (89%) and duty of care (87%) as the three most important criteria in selecting vehicles

- But, only two-thirds of fleets translate those concerns into initiatives to improve the work-related driving safety of staff
- ABS (53%), airbags (48%) and a good European New Car Assessment programme crash test rating (27%) – equal with ESC – were described as the most important safety aspects of a car. The fact that both

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mandated ESC as part of their company vehicle policy and ACFO chairman Julie Jenner said: “The task now is for all fleet managers to demand that ESC is included in discussions with their vehicle supplier to support the majority call to make ESC standard equipment.”

ABS and ESC were ranked in the top three in terms of ‘important safety equipment’ underlines their effectiveness in the eyes of fleet operators, according to Bosch.

- 57% of fleets have no mandated safety equipment on vehicles