

## Call for more ESC support

Fleets are being urged to help promote the benefits of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) being fitted to all new cars.

European crash test experts are encouraging fleets to put pressure on manufacturers to fit the safety technology as standard to all new cars.

And leasing company ALD Automotive also wants firms to have ESC as a mandatory feature on company cars.

The system uses automatic braking of individual wheels to help drivers maintain control of the vehicle in the event of a skid.

The calls come as part of a Europe-wide "Choose ESC" campaign, which is led by the European Commission and the European New Car Assessment Programme (Euro NCAP) among others, and was launched in Rome this week.

ALD marketing director David Yates said: "We would, wherever possible, encourage companies to have ESC as a mandatory feature within their car fleet policies, particularly as more manufacturers are offering the technology either as standard or an option."

Thatcham, the Motor Insurance Industry Research Centre, calculates that 400 lives and 3,000 serious injuries on UK roads could be saved if all new vehicles were equipped with ESC.

## Sensor woes

Parking sensors may be among drivers' most popular options but concerns have been raised that their use could result in damage to company vehicles.

Drivers relying on the technology are failing to use windows and mirrors to negotiate obstacles outside of their vehicles, according to bosses at leasing company Masterlease.

This incompetence is costing fleet managers a fortune through unnecessary parking prangs, they warn, and UK repair bills for vehicles are now estimated to be more than £7 billion a year.

# Scientists prove hands-free risk

BY STEVE MOODY

Scientists have finally proven that talking on a hands-free mobile phone is more distracting and potentially more dangerous than having a conversation with passengers.

Fleet managers who have introduced total bans on mobile phone use in cars have often encountered opposition from drivers who claim it cannot be any more distracting than having a conversation with rear seat passengers.

But research has found that a conversation on a hands-free phone requires more mental effort due to the lack of proximity, the extra effort involved in working out pauses and tone and the fact that the person on the other end of the line cannot react to changing road conditions to help the driver as a passenger can.

It is the first comprehensive research carried out in the UK looking at how the potential dangers of using hands-free phone kits and talking to passengers compare.

Hinting that fleets may want to take heed of the findings, possibly with a view to a total ban on mobile phone conversations while driving, the report's authors said: "The research may be particularly relevant to companies where employees use phones for work, and may wish to develop policies regarding phone use."

The study, called *Conversations in car: the relative hazards of mobile phones* and conducted by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) for the Department for Transport, also found more variations in speed when talking on the phone, with motorists often driving faster, while the ability to safely follow cars lessened.

Aside from the safety aspect, TRL also found the quality of information exchanged and decision-making deteriorated markedly.

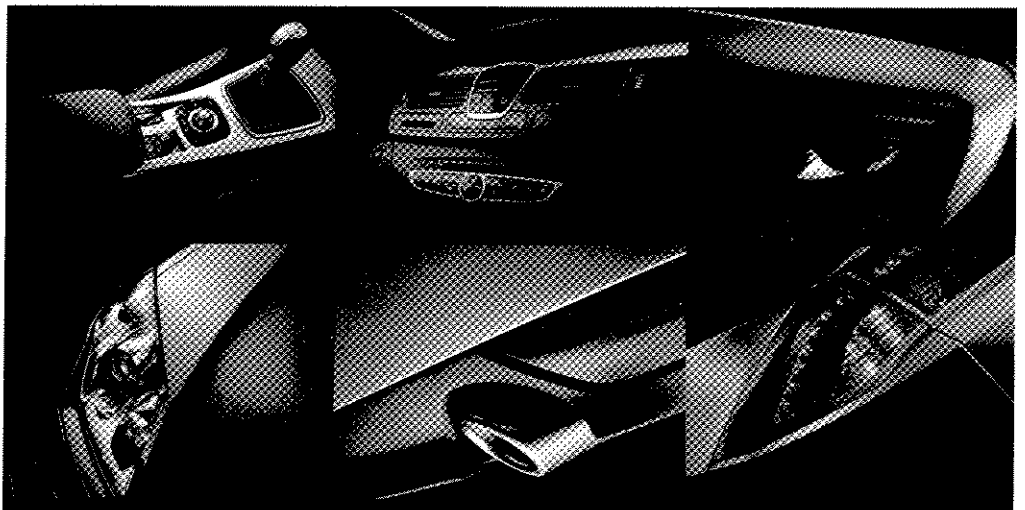
It noted that this could have a serious detrimental effect on work discussions.

It concluded: "One clear implication is that using a mobile phone via a hands-free kit while driving is not equivalent to talking to a passenger."

"It is a much more difficult task. The obvious conclusion is that it is not worth the increased potential risk of using a hands-free carphone."

TRL recommends that the DfT should consider including hands-free systems in any future legislation concerning banning the use of mobile phones.

■ *The report, priced at £40, is available from TRL by calling 01344 770783.*



## Getting a glimpse of Laguna's future

Renault has revealed teaser pictures of its new Laguna before unveiling the whole car on June 4.

The new Laguna is vital to the French firm, which has all but

given up trying to sell the current model. Poor reliability and low residuals have seen it slip off the radar, with only 1,200 sold in fleet so far this year.

Renault is claiming that the

new car will be a massive leap in terms of quality and driving dynamics with an "interior design that creates an atmosphere of calm and serenity for all occupants aboard".

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