

# Anti-skid device for all new cars in plan to save thousands of lives

► EU proposal for compulsory change

► Younger drivers may benefit most

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Motor manufacturers are to be forced to fit an anti-skidding device to every car, under a plan to save 4,000 lives and prevent 100,000 injuries a year across Europe.

Electronic Stability Control (ESC) recognises when a skid is starting to happen and applies the brakes to whichever wheel is necessary to keep the car under control. The system reacts more quickly than even the best driver and can select individual wheels for braking, which the driver cannot.

It is particularly effective during emergency avoidance manoeuvres and when the driver misjudges a bend. The driver may not even realise that the system has intervened.

ESC is fitted as standard on most luxury cars but very few manufacturers provide it on their smallest and cheapest cars, which are more likely to be driven by young drivers who would benefit from the device.

Young drivers are twice as likely to be involved in serious crashes as older and more experienced drivers. They are also much more likely to skid off the road after taking bends too fast or clipping the kerb.

The system typically costs about £400 when bought as an optional extra but the price is expected to drop sharply when it becomes compulsory. A US study found that it would add less than £100 to the average cost of a new car.

The Times has learnt that the European Commission will propose later this year that



Mercedes recalled A-class cars to fit them with ESC after one overturned in a 1997 swerve test

ESC be made compulsory on all new cars. Gunther Verheugen, the Commission's vice-president in charge of enterprise and industry, has written to the FIA Foundation, which promotes road safety, stating that ESC has substantial benefits and needs to become standard on all cars sold in Europe. The letter says: "I am committed to propose the obligatory introduction of ESC for passenger cars in 2007."

Mr Verheugen does not give a deadline by which all cars would have to comply but it is understood that there will be a staged introduction on different vehicle types, starting next year with lorries carrying dangerous chemicals.

The FIA Foundation is press-

ing for Europe to follow the lead of the US, which is planning to make ESC mandatory on all new cars sold from 2012.

David Ward, the foundation's director-general, said:

## 22%

Cars with ESC are 22 per cent less likely to crash than those without

Source: European New Car Assessment Programme

"This is a classic example of market failure because ESC is often not even available as an optional extra on the small cars which tend to be driven by young drivers. Manufacturers

have also confused drivers by using different brand names for this device, such as Electronic Stability Program or Dynamic Stability Control."

Mr Ward urged the Government to accelerate the introduction of ESC on cheaper cars by offering a discount on vehicle excise duty. Tax incentives in Denmark have resulted in almost half of new small cars being equipped with ESC, compared with about one in ten in Britain.

A study by the University of Cologne has found that ESC reduces the number of crashes caused by skidding by 80 per cent, which would save 4,000 lives and 100,000 serious injuries a year when fitted to all cars in Europe. Thatcham, the

## How system works

By comparing a car's speed and direction with the driver's steering input, ESC recognises when a skid is starting to happen



insurance industry's motor research centre, estimates that if ESC were fitted to 90 per cent of cars in Britain it would save 400 lives and prevent 3,000 serious injuries a year. A study last year by Thatcham found that 6 out of 38 manufacturers fitted ESC as standard to their range of UK vehicles. They were Mercedes, Audi, Volvo, Porsche, Lexus and Cadillac.

Some road safety groups have voiced concern that drivers will see ESC as a performance benefit rather than a safety feature, and take advantage of it to drive faster and take more risks.

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