

# INCREASING THE UPTAKE OF KEY VEHICLE SAFETY FEATURES – A CONSUMER FOCUSED APPROACH.

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## ABSTRACT

In 2006, having developed successful brand and on-going campaign on which to create demand for more crashworthy cars, ([www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au](http://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au)), the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) in Victoria, Australia looked at what opportunities were available to it, to further increase the safety of the Victorian vehicle fleet. The TAC is a government owned and operated, third party injury insurer that invests heavily in road safety initiatives to help meet its legislative responsibility to reduce the incidence and severity of transport injury on Victorian roads. In 2006, evidence around the effectiveness of, Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and Curtain Airbags (CA) in reducing crashes and injuries respectively, had firmed, yet compared with European and US vehicles the uptake of these lifesaving features in Australia was very poor.

Method: The TAC built a business case to extend its [howsafeisyourcar.com.au](http://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au) campaign, to specifically create awareness of and develop demand for ESC and CA. A mass media campaign was developed that included TV, radio and on-line advertising, outdoor billboards and point of sale promotions at events such as the Melbourne Formula 1 Grand Prix and the Melbourne Motorshow. Demonstrating how these usually invisible technologies worked to reduce crashes (ESC) and prevent serious injury (CA). The campaign was launched early in 2007 and continues to be used to this day.

Results: Since the development of the campaign, fitment rate of ESC and CA has increased dramatically, with Victoria outstripping the rest of Australia and is comparable to Europe in relation to standard fitment of the technologies. In addition, many vehicle manufacturers have made ESC standard in popular models and most importantly, the Victorian Government announced ahead of all other Australasian jurisdictions, the mandatory fitment of ESC on new cars registered after 31 December 2010.

Discussion: This paper will outline the development of the ESC and CA campaign. The barriers faced along the way and the outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) in Victoria, Australia is a government owned and operated third party injury insurer. In order to meet its legislative responsibility to reduce the incidence and severity of transport injury on Victorian roads, the TAC invests heavily in road safety initiatives. In 2006, the TAC having developed a successful on-going campaign and brand in [www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au](http://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au) on which to create demand for safer cars, looked at what opportunities were available to further increase the safety of the Victorian fleet.

At this time, the evidence around the effectiveness of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and Curtain Airbags (CA) in reducing crashes and deaths/injuries, respectively had firmed. ESC, an active vehicle safety technology which can assist drivers to avoid crashes by reducing the risk of skidding and losing control through selectively braking individual wheels to bring the vehicle back on track [1], has the potential to reduce single vehicle injury crashes by up to 30%. [2] No other active safety feature has the potential to reduce single vehicle crashes like ESC.

CA a passive safety feature, is designed to protect a vehicle occupant's head in the event of a side impact crash by forming a cushion between the occupant's head and the window and/or other objects such as trees and poles[3]. Research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety [4] estimated that head protecting airbags can reduce driver deaths in the event of a side impact crash by up to 40%, CA can make the difference between life or death.

Despite the lifesaving potential of these two technologies, the uptake rate of both were very poor, with only approximately 22% and 24% of new cars sold in Victoria with ESC and front CA

fitted, respectively in 2006 (refer to Fig. 1). According to TAC market research, only 1% and 5% of participants sought out ESC and CA respectively in their past vehicle purchase in 2006 [5]. These results indicated a potential lack of awareness of the existence and safety benefits of ESC and CA on the part of the consumers. The TAC has since built a business case to extend its [www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au](http://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au) campaign to specifically create awareness of and stimulate consumer demand for these critical safety features.

## METHOD

Between 2007 and 2009, the TAC developed and launched three public education campaigns in relation to ESC and CA to educate consumers about the lifesaving potential of these two technologies. The campaigns included:

### Four Little Words

With the assistance of Holden (GM Australia) and Bosch Australia, an advertisement was developed to highlight the difference between a vehicle with and without ESC in an emergency situation. The aim of this campaign was to firstly educate consumers about what ESC is and its safety benefits and secondly, to encourage consumers to ask for this technology on their next vehicle purchase. The recall rates of the campaign were between 19%-25%.

### Everyday Expert

This was an emotive and instructional advertisement in which the benefits of CA were discussed by an actress posing as a brain injured victim. The aim of this campaign was to educate consumers on the lifesaving potential of CA and to encourage consumers to demand CA in their next purchase. This campaign achieved good consistent recall, with recall rates between 63%-71%.

### James

This instructional advertisement urged buyers to cross off on their list any cars that did not have both ESC and CA. This campaign aimed to encourage consumers to put their safety first and to purchase a car only if it had both ESC and CA. The recall rates of the two tracked waves of the campaign were 19% and 24%.

Besides the TV advertisements, the public education campaigns included radio and on-line advertising, outdoor billboards and point of sale promotions at events such as the Melbourne Formula 1 Grand Prix and the Melbourne Motorshow. All TV advertisements and supporting activity directed consumers to

[www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au](http://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au) for more information. The first of the ESC and CA campaigns was launched early in 2007 and continues to be used to this day. The TAC was also involved in a number of partnerships that assisted in increasing awareness of ESC and CA among the general public and also acted as a support for the TAC's public education campaign. These included:

- working with road safety partners to raise awareness of the safety benefits and availability of ESC through the use of an ESC simulator
- continued support for the Australasian New Car Assessment Program
- funding and support for the development of ESC testing facilities.

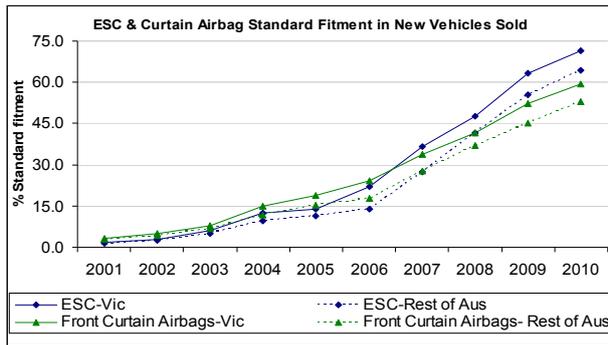
More details on these partnership activities can be found in another paper by Truong and colleagues. [6]

## RESULTS

The public education campaigns in relation to ESC and CA created greater awareness of and stimulated consumer demand for the technologies and contributed to two significant results. The first was the increased fitment of the two technologies as standard features in new vehicles sold and the second was the Victorian mandate of ESC.

### Fitment of ESC and CA in new vehicles sold

Since the development of the ESC and CA campaigns, the standard fitment rate of the two technologies has increased dramatically with Victoria outstripping the rest of Australia. The fitment of ESC and front CA in new vehicles was 22.2% and 24.2% respectively in 2006 and has risen to 71.3% and 59.5% respectively in 2010 (refer to Fig. 1). These results are comparable to Europe in relation to standard fitment of the technologies. In addition, many vehicle manufacturers such as Ford and Holden (GM Australia) have made ESC standard in popular models, boosting fitment rates considerably



**Figure 1 – ESC and Curtain Airbag Standard Fitment Rate in New Vehicles Sold**

[Source: R.L. Polk Australia]

### Victorian Government ESC Mandate

One of the most important developments since the launch of the ESC campaigns was the Victorian Government announcement of the mandatory fitment of ESC on new cars registered (with the exception of light commercial vehicles) after 31 December 2010.

Although fitment rates for ESC had been steadily rising, the TAC welcomed the mandate, as it knew it would accelerate availability and uptake, and ensure that consumers purchasing new vehicles from 2011 would have the extra safety protection offered by ESC. The overall Victorian fleet will also benefit from the mandate once these new vehicles enter the second hand market.

The Victorian Government recognized the life saving benefits of ESC and introduced the mandate ahead of all other jurisdictions in Australia. However, the Federal Government soon followed Victoria's lead and announced that all new models of passenger vehicles must be fitted with ESC from November 2011, with all models to have the technology from November 2013, bringing the rest of Australia in line with Victoria. ESC mandation is an important development that will greatly increase the safety of the Australian fleet.

### DISCUSSION

Since the commencement of the TAC's public education campaigns specifically promoting ESC and CA, uptake of the two technologies has increased dramatically. Importantly, the increased awareness of the safety features and their benefits made it easier for the Victorian Government to announce, ahead of all other Australasian

jurisdictions, the mandatory fitment of ESC on new cars registered after December 31 2010.

There were however, a number of issues faced along the way. These included:

#### Bundling of safety features

Often safety features such as ESC and CA were offered as a package, usually in conjunction with other non-safety related items such as leather seats or 6 stacker CD players. The cost of these packages was not insignificant and formed a barrier to the easy uptake of key safety features the TAC was promoting.

#### Safety features offered as optional extras

ESC was often not a standard feature on new cars, but available as optional extras. Depending on the make and model of the car, this could add \$800-\$1200 to the purchase price. Besides the additional cost being a disincentive, the immediate availability of cars with ESC was also a barrier to consumers. Imported cars ordered with ESC as an optional extra, would sometimes take up to 3 months to be delivered. A long time to wait when non-ESC equipped were available on the car lot to driver away immediately!

#### Safety features not offered in Australia

When promotional activities commenced in 2006, the fitment rate of ESC and CA were only 22.2% and 24.2% respectively in 2006 and were seriously lagging behind Europe. Some safety features available on cars in Europe were not offered to consumers when the same cars were imported to Australia. For example, the Toyota Corolla was available in the Northern European market with ESC but the car imported into the Australian market did not have ESC available.

#### Australian Standards and consumers

It was important to educate consumers that not all cars were 'created equal' and that 'some cars were safer than others'. In some consumers' minds, all new cars were considered safe as they have met the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) applicable to safety. However, as demonstrated by the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP), the safety performance of new cars available on the market, all of which passed the ADRs, can still vary greatly. Consumers needed to be educated about the importance of purchasing a car with a good safety rating and technologies such as ESC and CA can further enhance the safety of a car.

Since promotional activities to increase consumer awareness and demand of ESC and CA and the

subsequent ESC mandate, many of the barriers mentioned are no longer an issue for new passenger vehicles. However, light commercial vehicles have been exempt from the ESC mandate and fitment of ESC and CA in this sector remain poor. More work remains to be done in increasing the fitment of ESC and CA in light commercial vehicles.

To date, promotional activities have focused more heavily on ESC, however, with the ESC mandate now in place, more effort will be dedicated to CA. The TAC will continue to promote and educate consumers about the availability and safety benefits of CA to further accelerate the uptake of the technology. Promotion of ESC will also continue, but will now be directed at the used car market.

## CONCLUSION

ESC and CA are two life saving technologies that were not widely available in Victoria. Through public education campaigns and supporting promotional activities, consumer demand for these technologies was stimulated and a steady increase in the availability of ESC and CA resulted. The demand for these critical safety features and the increased availability paved the way for the Victorian Government to announce the mandate of ESC in new vehicles in 2011 ahead of all other Australian jurisdictions. Many barriers faced when the TAC first started promoting vehicle safety have been overcome and the TAC, seeing the success to date, will continue its efforts in encouraging the uptake of CA, as well as directing promotions at the light commercial and used car markets.

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