

OUTLINE

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“Safer Vehicles” Section

Changing community and manufacturers views on the benefits of safer cars-a non-regulatory road safety success story.

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The Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) independently crash tests and assesses the relative safety performance of new cars sold in Australia and New Zealand. The Program commenced almost 20 years ago based on a similar program in the USA. These programs have and are extending around the world. The aim is to encourage the development and introduction of safety features in new cars by the use of a non-regulatory competitive market mechanism on manufacturers.

Vehicles are a key element of the safe systems approach to road safety, and improvement in vehicle safety is a critical mechanism for delivering reduced trauma. Research has shown that car safety improvements could effectively reduce road trauma by as much as 25%, demonstrating that ANCAP, by encouraging the introduction safe cars, can make a major contribution to improving road safety results.

Community attitudes to car safety features have been tracked in different opinion surveys since the mid 90's. These surveys have been both qualitative and quantitative. Some have been national while others are state based. Those surveyed have varied from new car buyers to motorists generally. This paper is a reflection of the general views from those surveys. Attitudes by consumers to safety and responses by manufacturers to ANCAP have changed dramatically in 20 years. Both have encouraged manufacturers to introduce safer cars ahead of regulation requirements. In addition, manufacturers have moved from resisting ANCAP to now promoting ANCAP ratings and the ANCAP brand.

Research of safety in car advertising prior to and at the time of the introduction of ANCAP results showed a substantial change as several manufacturers began to promote safety features, particularly airbags.

Other research assessed consumers and fleet owners preparedness to pay for airbags, not only in new car purchases but also in hire car rates.

ANCAP has used a range of techniques in an attempt to encourage consumers to specify safety in their new car purchase. Comparative classification systems have evolved, comparisons with other similar international assessment bodies made, direct and stakeholder advertising and promotion programs undertaken to consumers as well as car dealers and targeted promotions to fleet owners and a range of journalists made.

ANCAP has and will continue to increase the levels of performance required to meet the ratings, to recognise the technological developments in new car design and manufacture, not only in occupant and pedestrian protection but also in collision avoidance.

Continued stakeholder commitment and support over 20 years has allowed the program to build the credibility of the results, which along with those from similar programs around the world can be closely correlated with real world crash results.

Early objections to the program from some manufacturers and regulators have been demonstrated to be unfounded and many manufactures and the collective body of Australian manufacturers as well as the Australian Government regulator support and assist in the promotion of the program today.

With increasing internationalisation of communications and also vehicle models, links with like bodies and their consumer advice programs has been vital. ANCAP has been able to assist with the developments in new bodies over the 20 years. Recently after the formation of Global NCAP (GNCAP), an organisation committed to encouraging safer vehicles in new areas, particularly developing countries, ANCAP has been able to assist with a new non regulatory testing and assessment body in the ASEAN region. The lessons learned in Australasia communicating the benefits of safer cars to consumers and hence encouraging safer cars into the market will be provided to assist the new ASEAN NCAP.

This review has identified key actions by consumers who were disillusioned by car safety information, which appear to have had a major impact on the introduction of safer vehicles.

The paper analyses and summarises various opinion surveys including a recent 2012 survey of motorists in Australian and New Zealand, comments on developments in ANCAP testing and communication programs during that time and outlines proposed actions to encourage further improvements in new car safety related performance.

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