PACTS Safer Vehicles 2016 Conference

Chairman's introductory Statement

By David Ward, Secretary General of the Global New Car Assessment Programme

Over the last fifteen years there has been a 45% reduction in road deaths on Britain's roads. The largest single contributor to this significant improvement in UK road safety has been safer vehicles. This has come about firstly through better crashworthiness and secondly the introduction of crash avoidance technologies. Levels of occupant protection have been transformed with the fitment of air bags, better seat belts, and crumple zones. This progress is now being supplemented by crash avoidance systems like electronic stability control (ESC) and autonomous emergency braking (AEB).

There have been two key ingredients to this life saving success story. Firstly, there was a strong commitment by Government to standardize improved safety design and technologies; and secondly, there was an equal determination to achieve this through the European Union (EU).

Twenty years ago EU crash test standards were strengthened by a UK initiative. Based on British research by the Transport Research Laboratory, a campaign headed by British leadership of the FIA (the world federation of motoring clubs) & the European Transport Council, and supported by a British Member of the European Parliament, Alan Donnelly, (then Member for Tyne and Wear) scored a major win for consumer safety in Europe. Despite fierce opposition for the car industry amendments to draft Directives for front and side impact were adopted that substantially increased the stringency of the regulations.

This was followed by another powerful British initiative to empower consumers by promoting a market for safer vehicles. The UK Government, together with the FIA, the Swedish and Dutch Governments, created the European New Car Assessment Programme (Euro NCAP). Its first results, launched here in 1997, revealed a range of poor results of popular small cars that again drew strong criticism from industry. But today 'five star' Euro NCAP ratings are established as an industry benchmark that is far higher than the EU's original regulatory requirements.

Together the EU's crash regulations and EURO NCAP have contributed significantly to the massive 55% improvement in occupant fatalities that have been achieved across the EU over the last fifteen years. What are the lessons of this remarkable success in combining regulation with consumer information?

One is that Britain could not have done this alone. The opposition from industry would have been overwhelming had we decided to act unilaterally. By scaling the issue of vehicle safety to the EU level and winning the arguments through effective political engagement we won huge gains for consumers in Britain and across Europe. Another lesson is that we could only obtain this scale by regulation across the Single Market which is the world's second largest centre of car producing after China. In contrast the UN's World Forum for Harmonisation of Vehicle Regulations, although very valuable, is voluntary and non-binding.

This European success was repeated again more recently in another campaign to make ESC, probably the most significant life saving device since the seat belt, mandatory across the EU. Once again a British led initiative called 'Choose ESC' managed by 'eSafety Aware', prompted the European Union to make ESC standard fit for new models from 2012 and all cars in production by 2014.

The legacy of these campaigns contributes every year to reduced death rates in Britain and across the EU. The lives of thousands of British people and tens of thousands of our fellow Europeans have been saved as a result. And now other emerging automotive economies like Brazil, India and Mexico are applying the same or equivalent standards available from the UN's vehicle regulatory framework. This is vital as still unfortunately millions of new cars are sold in unregulated markets that would fail EU/UN crash standards and score zero in NCAP tests.

Improved vehicle safety is the gift that keeps on giving. As the vehicle fleet turns over more and more vehicles meet acceptable crash standards and are fitted with ESC…reducing the risk of crashes and fatal injury. Currently nearly 50% of the UK fleet have ESC on board. So we will continue to see improvements from this technology for years ahead. To reach 100% penetration of ESC may take another ten years. This provides another lesson to policy makers: delay costs lives! Clear signals in favour of standardization across the Single Market and by UN global harmonization will deliver economies of scale, reducing costs, whilst accelerating fitment rates that ultimately save lives.

The next candidate for standardization is AEB. Automatic braking systems already on the market are showing impressive rates of crash reduction. AEB with pedestrian detection also offer the potential to reduce fatality rates among vulnerable road users. In the US the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration (NHTSA) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) have negotiated a voluntary commitment by twenty car companies (representing 99% of the US market) to make AEB standard by 2022. The IIHS estimate that if every car in 2014 had AEB there would be 700,000 fewer property damage claims and 200,000 fewer personal injury claims.

It's impressive to see progress on AEB in the US without recourse to regulation. It shows that there can be different routes to standardization. But it begs the question what is happening here? At the moment no similar initiative is being discussed. Surely it's another case where the UK can lead in Europe and push for a parallel voluntary initiative on AEB standardization?

Even under the new US voluntary agreement it will take until 2034 to reach an 80% AEB penetration rate in their fleet. This puts in perspective the reality that fully autonomous cars will not begin to make a significant impact on the safety of our roads until the second half of the 21st century. So the priority now should be to accelerate standardization of AEB as part of a pan–EU initiative. And this will help build consumer acceptance of autonomous driving as AEB helps to familiarize consumers with systems that take control of the vehicle in safety critical situations.

This is an exciting time for vehicle safety. It is better by far to stop the crash than to have one and crash avoidance technologies now offer the potential to contribute at least as much as crash worthiness has in the past. Anti-lock brakes in motorcycles is a prime example with proven effectiveness and where the EU has already taken a lead. This year ABS will be mandatory on all new motorcycles above 125cc. Of course, speed remains a paramount issue in road casualty reduction. Speed assists systems keep drivers informed about posted speed limits and warn if they are being exceeded. From this year Euro NCAP is now including SAS in its rating system.

We also now have the strongest ever global commitment to road safety. In January the UN's new framework of Sustainable Development Goals were introduced which for the first time include road safety with a very ambitious target to halve global road deaths by 2020. This target is consistent with the EU's own casualty reduction target and reinforces the aims of the current UN Decade of Action for Road

Safety. In April the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution endorsing this target and calling for "Policies and measures to implement United Nations vehicle safety regulations or equivalent national standards to ensure that all new motor vehicles, meet applicable minimum regulations for occupant and other road users' protection, with seat belts, air bags and active safety systems as standard".

This is the clearest and strongest commitment to global standardisation of vehicle safety ever made by UN Member States. To honour these commitments, I believe this country must continue to demonstrate its track record of leadership in vehicle safety both in the EU and the UN. This has already saved tens of thousands of lives at home and abroad. Safety technologies can help us to eventually eliminate death and serious injuries from our roads but the UK simply can't achieve this by acting alone.

Thank you very much.