

**STATEMENT OF
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Press Conference on the 40th Anniversary of the New Car Assessment Program

“NCAPs at 40 - Celebrating Four Decades of Vehicle Safety Success Born in the USA”

I am delighted to be here with Joan Claybrook and very grateful to Advocates for Highway Safety for arranging this opportunity to celebrate a huge American contribution to road injury prevention. The winning formula for improved automotive safety has been the combination of mandatory standards and consumer information. And the first time this was systematically harnessed together was here in the USA when the Administration of President Jimmy Carter launched the New Car Assessment Programme (NCAP).

In 1979 the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, led by Joan Claybrook, began to publish crash test results at a higher level of stringency than required by federal standards and the NCAP era began. It has now become a worldwide phenomenon, with NCAPs – or similar testing programmes – now working in Australasia, Africa, China, Europe, India, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Latin America, South East Asia and, of course, here where it all started, with the US NCAP and also the work of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Over the last 40 years the spread of NCAPs around the world have contributed hugely to making automobiles safer than ever before. They have added a powerful demand-pull factor alongside the supply-push of regulation. NCAPs have stimulated manufacturers to offer models for sale that far exceed mandated standards and they have encouraged consumers to buy the safest cars they can afford. All involved at NHTSA in the launch of the US NCAP can be justifiably proud that their initiative back in 1979 has now been replicated across the globe. NCAP, born in the USA, has proved to be a life-saving gift to the world that keeps on giving.

My role with NCAPs began 25 years ago when I was involved in a campaign to improve European Union crash test standards and to launch Euro NCAP. This culminated in the release of the first ever results in 1997 and a year later the implementation of new crash tests for front and side impact. At that time around 45,000 people were being killed every year across the EU. Today, although it is still unacceptably high, 25,000 people die annually in road crashes across the EU which is now the safest road network in the world. Vehicle occupant deaths have halved and in 2017 it was estimated that the combination of EU legislation and Euro NCAP ratings have saved around 78,000 lives. But Euro NCAP is not satisfied with that and is updating its test protocols every five years. This process of continuous evolution has made Euro NCAP the world’s most advanced consumer test programme.

In 2011 I was also proud to launch the Global New Car Assessment Programme (Global NCAP) which serves as a platform to promote consumer safety testing worldwide. I have been privileged to see the NCAP effect at work in the world’s major emerging automotive markets. And once again it has proved to be a remarkable catalyst for improved vehicle safety. Latin NCAP, for example, was launched in 2010 with the region’s best-selling cars all scoring zero stars, vehicles that would fail to meet either US or EU crash test regulations. Last month Latin NCAP released a five-star rating for the region’s current best seller, the Chevrolet Onix. The model even obtained a special award for meeting pedestrian protection standards that are not yet applied in the USA.

More recently I have been involved in our 'Safer Cars for India' initiative which is a kind of pilot project to establish a permanent NCAP in India which is now the fifth largest vehicle producer in the world. Our first test results in 2014 were nearly all zero-star cars, again below minimum standards of the EU and the USA. Last December, after 30 models have been tested, we were delighted to award India's first ever five star car to the Tata Nexon. And in parallel, the Indian Government has introduced new crash test standards for front and side impact and for pedestrian protection. In fact, their crashworthiness requirements - because they now include pedestrian protection - now exceed those applied here in the USA. These examples show the power of the NCAP model as a dynamic agent for change, building a market for safety across the world.

Today I would like to highlight three principle characteristics of NCAPs which I think help to explain their effectiveness and success.

Firstly, NCAPs must have strong operational independence, integrity and outreach. NCAPs work because they are trusted by the car buying public. Of course, they must offer a level playing field to the manufacturers who are competing against their rivals to demonstrate their engineering skill and product safety performance. In addition, they must be based on sound evidence and technology assessment, so that their ratings positively influence real world crash risks and outcomes. And they need to exploit the growth of on-line media and find new ways to reach the car buying public. All of this requires secure funding and continuous research capabilities.

Secondly, NCAPs should always promote best available technologies. They work best when they encourage both innovation and real-world deployment by stretching manufacturer performance. NCAPs are not about minimum standards which is the traditional role of mandatory regulation. That is why they should include tests that are not ready or even suitable for regulation. And that is why they need to be regularly updated to keep pace with technological development. This will become more challenging and even more important as we transition to a world of advanced driver assistance and semi-autonomous vehicles. As a rule of thumb if an NCAP finds that most of its test models score five stars then that is a powerful indicator that the ratings need an upward revision.

Thirdly, it is essential to maintain a constructive dialogue with manufacturers (OEMS) but with the important caveat that OEM associations have a poor record of negative influence on NCAPs. Both when manufacturers do well or poorly in NCAP tests the dialogue that follows is enormously valuable. It empowers both engineers and those responsible for brand values to strive to do better. Unfortunately, this positive dynamic is entirely absent at the level of OEM associations. Whilst they try to represent the industry on NCAP matters, they are never truly representative of the capabilities of the automakers. Unfortunately, they always move at the speed of their least competitive member. And that is why they have proved to be so often a drag anchor on NCAPs around the world.

As we celebrate its first forty years, I hope that US NCAP can again show the same mould breaking power that it did in 1979. As other NCAPs around the world become increasingly sophisticated it will surely be desirable for the tradition of US leadership in automotive safety to be demonstrated once again. The NCAP community around the world was encouraged to see the proposed update of US NCAP in 2015 and I think we all hope that it will be implemented soon. For it is only by continuous improvement that any NCAP maintains its effectiveness and is the way to make US NCAP great again. Thank you very much.