

**STATEMENT OF**  
**Joan Claybrook, President Emeritus, Public Citizen**  
**Board Member, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**  
**Former Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**  
**October 17, 2019**  
**Press Conference on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Car Assessment Program**

Good morning. I am Joan Claybrook. From 1977 to 1981 I served as Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration appointed by President Jimmy Carter. This relatively new agency had the monumental task of improving and overseeing the safety and fuel economy of motor vehicles. This mission was especially urgent as nearly 50,000 people were being killed in motor vehicle crashes annually.

Shortly after assuming office I became concerned about the differential between highway speeds and the 30 MPH test speed in NHTSA's new air bag rule. I also learned that auto companies were testing their vehicles at insufficient speeds to assure that all vehicles produced complied with federal safety standards. We therefore decided to challenge the auto companies by providing consumers, for the first time ever, with information about the safety performance of new cars beyond the requirements in the federal safety standards. We conducted these tests at 35 MPH which was 5 MPH above the standard requirement.

In 1979, we named this idea the New Car Assessment Program, commonly known as "NCAP." This important tool has provided car buyers with critical safety information. And, 40 years later, the program has been emulated across the globe, in Australia, China, Europe, Japan, Korea, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Underpinning the success of NCAP is the reality that safety sells. NCAP reports were wildly popular with the public, and automakers were quick to take notice. In 2005, the release of NCAP information was brought to another level with the creation of "Stars on Cars," which visually demonstrates safety ratings on showroom price window stickers. We hope other countries will soon begin to adopt this as well.

Unfortunately, after that improvement, the U.S. NCAP has not kept up with important advances in vehicle safety. This program is a mere shell of its former self, easily manipulated by auto makers seeking the five-star rating, which is nearly irrelevant today because of a reliance on outdated metrics and insufficient types of tests. As a result, consumers are ill-served by a program that at one time was an invaluable source of auto safety information.

Today we are releasing a research paper, "NCAP at 40: Time to Return to Excellence," that highlights serious deficiencies and outlines proposed actions to improve the program and restore it to its original significance. We are here this morning on Capitol Hill, urging Congress and NHTSA to swiftly act on these recommendations which include adding the following items to the NCAP ratings:

- 1) boosting *pre*-crash performance by incorporating proven crash avoidance technologies such as automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning and blind spot detection;
- 2) modernizing and enhancing crash tests;
- 3) augmenting safety for pedestrians, bicyclists and other road users;
- 4) adding a "silver" rating for older motorist safety issues; and,
- 5) improving public access to NCAP ratings.

Not only will this revitalization of U.S. NCAP provide better information to consumers, it will also incentivize manufacturers to make their cars safer.

We notified NHTSA about this event, and remarkably, yesterday the Agency released a statement about plans to propose changes to NCAP in 2020. While this is welcome news, the devil is in the details. We urge NHTSA to ensure its proposed changes address the upgrades I just mentioned and that the proposal is followed by swift action to take effect in 2021.

We look forward to working with NHTSA and our safety partners to bring the U.S. NCAP into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I'd like particularly to thank David Ward for his dedication to Global NCAP and his tireless work to promote NCAP safety information and U.N. vehicle standards across the globe. He is the model of the energetic advocate, pushing one country after another to adopt NCAP and educate the buying public.

And, I'd like to recognize the many contributions of Jack Gillis, Executive Director of the Consumer Federation of America, and the late Clarence Ditlow, who were both instrumental in assuring consumers have adequate safety information through their publication of "The Car Book". Copies of the 39<sup>th</sup> edition are available here today. Jack helped develop the first Car Book with crash test information for me at NHTSA.

I also want to commend the National Transportation Safety Board for calling attention to necessary NCAP upgrades through their work investigating crashes and issuing recommendations. Lastly, I would like to thank Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety for hosting this event, for co-authoring the report with me, and for 30 years of incredible efforts to make our roads safer.

As we mark four decades of U.S. NCAP, it is vital to accelerate improvements so we can once again boast that this top-notch five-star program is advancing auto safety in the marketplace. Thank you all for joining us today.