

VODAFONE McLAREN MERCEDES

Heikki takes part in FIA eSafety Challenge

9th September 2009

It's rare to see a Vodafone McLaren Mercedes driver behind the wheel of a road car – but glimpsing Heikki Kovalainen peering down cheerily from the cockpit of a 10-wheeler Mercedes-Benz Actros truck? That's pretty unusual.

But this wasn't simply a day of fun for Heikki: he was a special guest at the [FIA's eSafety Challenge](#) conference at the Vallelunga circuit near Rome, Italy, to help demonstrate how advances in motor vehicle electronic intelligence can be used to reduce road traffic accidents and save lives.

Joining fellow Formula 1 stars Giancarlo Fisichella, Timo Glock, Robert Kubica and former world champion Michael Schumacher, as well as DTM racer Susie Stoddart and eight-time Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen, Heikki was not only on-hand to stress the importance of these technological advances in the field of road safety, but to demonstrate their practical worth too.

Heikki's Mercedes-Benz Actros was fitted with Electronic Stability Control (ESC), a computer brain that can subtly take control of the vehicle's throttle and brakes when it senses the vehicle is slipping out of control.

For the demonstration, Heikki switched off the ESC and accelerated the truck to a speed of 35km/h around an artificially dampened test track. Upon reaching the prescribed speed, the truck began to wobble precariously, only being saved from tipping by the addition of two large stabilizers on each side of the vehicle.

Heikki then repeated the demo, this time with ESC switched on. The difference was noticeable: at the same speed, the truck automatically applied the brakes and dampened the throttle in order to keep the vehicle from tipping.

Heikki was highly impressed by the system: "On a slippery surface, it's quite hard to keep control of the truck – even at low speeds," he said. "But with the ESC, the whole vehicle is much more manageable and less prone to tipping. I think this clearly demonstrates the importance of electronic systems in improving road safety. Studies show that if all cars in the EU used ESC, then around 4,000 lives a year could be saved and we could reduce road traffic injuries by more than 10,000 – those are incredible figures.

"My role at the FIA eSafety Challenge is to help raise public awareness of eSafety technology and how it can save lives. It's important that people know these devices are either on the market or will shortly be available and that they can have a say in saving lives today. Even though I'm a Formula 1 driver, I can still get into difficulties on the public roads – anyone can – and we need all the help we can get to improve safety and save lives."

Recent News Stories

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Press Release | Santander extends Partnership with Vodafone McLaren Mercedes |
| McLaren News | Santander extends Partnership with Vodafone McLaren Mercedes |
| McLaren News | 2009 Santander Italian Grand Prix |