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eSafety Challenge - Speech by Paul Clark MP

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I am delighted to be here today, and to meet so many likeminded and committed people, who share our determination to improve road safety, and reduce the appalling toll of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Since my recent appointment as Road Safety Minister in the UK, I have been tremendously impressed by the international co-operation shown by road safety professionals across Europe.

Road safety is an issue that links and concerns everyone. We are united by a common desire to make vehicles and roads safer not just for drivers and passengers - but also for pedestrians, cyclists, and all other road users.

By working together and sharing best practice, we all benefit. And that is why initiatives like the eSafety Challenge are so important.

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I am sure that like me, you are looking forward to seeing some of the world's greatest drivers later this afternoon demonstrating exactly how advanced systems can enhance safety.

But in my short speech today, I would like to say a few words about the UK perspective on road safety, and how our experience might help other countries in Europe to reduce casualties on their roads.

We have a long and proud tradition of road safety in the UK, stretching back to the early 19th century, before the development of the internal combustion engine, when horses and carriages were the most popular form of transport.

The Highway Act of 1835 was the first to prohibit riding or carriage driving on the pavement to improve protection for pedestrians.

In recent decades we have worked extremely hard to successfully reduce casualties, and to make Britain's roads among the safest in the world. In 2000, for example, we set a target to reduce deaths and serious injuries by 40% over ten years compared with the 1994-1998 baseline average. Our figures show that we had achieved that 40% reduction target two years early - in 2008.

But we are not complacent, and we remain determined to tackle the root causes of a menace that still accounts for around 2,500 deaths and 26,000 serious injuries a year in Great Britain.

We are confident that further improvements to vehicles, to the road infrastructure, and to driver training will help us continue to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

This strategy focuses on 'the three Es': better education, enforcement and engineering - and understanding the relationships between the road, the road user and the vehicle to tackle the root causes of accidents.

At the end of April, we launched a consultation on our new long-term road safety strategy, which will come into force in 2010. This sets out a fresh range of ambitious initiatives and ideas as well as drawing on established best practice. It sets out a new vision to make Britain's roads the safest in the world.

We have consulted on new targets, including a suggested primary goal to reduce deaths and serious injuries by a third, and to reduce road deaths and serious injuries to children and young people by at least half by 2020.



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To enable us to reach these targets we need to ensure that the necessary technologies are available across the range of the vehicle fleet. Vehicle manufacturers have made great strides in recent years improving levels of safety, but new technologies are developing all the time, and we need to ensure safety features are used throughout car ranges to protect as many road users as possible.

Regulation can help us achieve that goal, but in today's climate, it should be a last resort. Often consumer information initiatives can be equally effective and make as big an impact on the market.

Consumer awareness, the goal of eSafetyAware, has proved an effective tool in delivering these targets over the past 10 years. That's why I am pleased that the UK was the first Member State to become a member. We support all such initiatives that can raise the profile of vehicle technologies and their potential to save lives.

UK NCAP was one such initiative, which as you know developed into the hugely successful EuroNCAP programme.

Its star rating scheme provides consumers with a safety benchmark and has become a catalyst for encouraging the manufacturers to make significant safety improvements to new car design.

Ensuring drivers are aware of new technologies and what they can deliver is a key element - and an area where eSafetyAware has a vital role to play.

Over the past two decades, for example, we have seen dramatic improvements to vehicle occupant protection, through the development of crumple zones and advanced safety systems like pretensioning seat belts and airbags.

The latest developments in advanced vehicle technologies, some of which we will see later on today, now offer the potential to avoid collisions altogether. In 2007, DfT commissioned research into ESC which indicated that ESC-equipped passenger cars are involved in 25% fewer fatal road accidents, and are 11% less likely to be involved in a serious accident.

We have a duty to promote and encourage uptake of the most effective mitigation systems - as well as continuing to develop those that have further potential to avoid collisions.

Advanced Driver Assistance Systems such as those demonstrated here today can play an important part in helping drivers use the roads more safely. I am also keen to see how these technologies could also benefit vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.

It is exactly this type of event that provides the opportunity to raise public awareness, particularly given the support from drivers such as [Michael, Heikki and Susie]. The support of these motorsport stars helps us to reach a wider group of individuals, particularly young drivers who are often among the most vulnerable on our roads.

Of course some of the advanced safety technologies that are now available stem from systems originally developed for motorsport - many of them in the UK, which is at the forefront of motorsport research and technological development. It is entirely appropriate therefore that I can announce that we have agreed to support eSafetyAware in holding the 2010 eSafety Challenge in the UK.

But we in the UK also know that we still have a lot to learn about evolving safety technologies and safety practices from other European countries, other European car manufacturers, and other leading motorsport teams.

This afternoon's demonstrations will provide us all with an excellent opportunity to experience new technologies that will help us reduce casualties further on European roads in the years to come.

I hope you will join us in the UK next year for what we hope will be as successful and exciting an event as this.

Thank you.

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