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Kovalainen in truck demo for FIA safety campaign

10 September 2009

Heikki Kovalainen was one of several racing drivers present at Italy's Vallelunga circuit this week as motorsport governing body the FIA launched its latest campaign for road safety. The scheme aims to demonstrate how electronic intelligence can be used in a bid to cut down on road accidents.



As well as McLaren's Kovalainen, seven-time Champion Michael Schumacher was present at the track near Rome as well as local man Giancarlo Fisichella, Timo Glock, Robert Kubica, DTM competitor Susie Stoddart and eight-time Le Mans 24h winner Tom Kristensen.



Fisichella and Schumacher with Jean Todt, former Ferrari Team Principal, at Vallelunga

Kovalainen's participation in the event was perhaps the most dramatic as the Finn performed a demonstration in a 10-wheeled Mercedes-Benz Actros truck; the reason for such an act was to show usage of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) - the device is able to sense when a vehicle is sliding out of control and manage the throttle and braking accordingly in order to avoid an accident.

The test proved for exciting viewing as Kovalainen first reached speeds of 35km/h (22mph) on a damp surface. '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,' McLaren described.

The team-mate to World Champion Lewis Hamilton then attempted the same pattern but with ESC switched on. 'The difference was noticeable,' onlookers witnessed. 'At the same speed, the truck automatically applied the brakes and dampened the throttle in order to keep the vehicle from tipping.'



"On a slippery surface, it's quite hard to keep control of the truck - even at low speeds," Heikki commented afterwards, "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. 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 that these devices are either on the market or will shortly be available and that they can have a say in saving lives today."



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