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Something unseen that can save your life

By Phil Vaughan

HERE'S a car conundrum: you can't see it, you may not even know you have it, but you benefit vastly from it and, by 2014, every new motor has to have it. What is it?

It's the Electronic Stability Programme, or ESP.

Introduced by Bosch 14 years ago, ESP is basically a life-saving safety system which combines three technologies under the one heading.

It is a vehicle active chassis braking safety programme, which can prevent a car going into a potentially-dangerous skid. It marries **anti-lock** braking, traction control with electronic stability.

Bosch has put together a special website if you want to see this life-saver in action.

Go online to www.bosch-esperience.co.uk to view track-driving demonstrations, and see animations of how the technology works.

It has been so successful since its 1995 launch that more and more manufacturers have strived to make ESP a standard-fit on new cars.

Some 81% of new cars registered in Germany last year, for instance, came with ESP. That's good, but for a system that can prevent up to 80% of all skidding accidents, it should be a more universal fit.

The market that currently misses it most is that of small cars - yet it's just as important here as it is in larger motors.

Several countries, such as the US, already have legislation in place to make ESP mandatory in new vehicles, and European countries' output must have it fitted by 2011, before it becomes a legal requirement worldwide in 2014.

Adrian Walsh, director of RoadSafe, a lead-



LIFE SAVING: Bosch's Electronic Stability Programme (ESP) helps prevent accidents. Photo: PA

ing UK road safety forum, has backed the drive for cheaper runabouts to have electronic stability control fitted sooner.

Several city cars and superminis being sold in the UK don't even offer the system as an option, although more and more are doing so.

Superminis, for example, account for a third of all UK new car registrations, but electronic stability was fitted as standard on only 9% of vehicles registered in the first half of 2008, and added as an option on another 5%.

That means 86% of superminis registered in the first six months of last year took to the roads without it.

Recent research, too, by Britain's Department for Transport suggests that vehicles equipped with ESP are 25% less likely to be

involved in a fatal crash than those without it.

That equates to 380 fatal crashes and the reduction of injuries by 7,800.

Doctor Werner Struth, president of the Bosch chassis systems control division, rightly says: "Small cars remain our main concern."

The other vital warning here, given the forthcoming 2011 European legislation, is for this year's new-car buyers to ensure they source a vehicle that has ESP fitted - otherwise they could find potential customers walking away from it at sell-on time in two or three years' time.

So - no, you can't see it: but make sure you've got it the next time you buy a new car.

