

Roof tests to roll

Australian cars to come under scrutiny for roof strength in test program

By JAMES STANFORD

THE roof strength of Australian cars finally will be tested, despite the absence of a relevant Australian Design Rule (ADR).

A group led by the NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre will begin testing the roof strength of locally produced vehicles in the next six to 12 months.

At this stage the tests will be done independently of the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) crash test operation, although it is interested in the outcomes and may present the data in future.

The tests will rate roof crush using a system that has been in operation in the US for decades – not to be confused with a dynamic rollover test, which safety groups around the world are working towards.

NSW Risk Management Centre chair of road safety, Raphael Grzebieta, said current ADRs did nothing to test the roof strength of vehicles.

"You could have a roof made out of spaghetti and still pass the ADRs," he told



Volvo XC90

GoAuto at the SAE-A Change by Design forum in Melbourne recently.

"Unfortunately, we have a pretty pathetic federal government in terms of introducing Australian Design Rules that we know would change the safety of vehicles."

Professor Grzebieta said road safety experts have been pushing for tests to improve roof strength for years, but no progress had been made.

"We keep getting the excuses coming back about harmonisation with the rest of the world, and that is a crock because we were the first to introduce seatbelts, we were the first to introduce breath tests, we were the first to introduce three-point seatbelts on to buses and had the rollover tests for buses," he said.

"That was in the good times when the Federal Office of Road Safety tuned into safety issues."

Prof Grzebieta said roof strength and rollover protection was vehicle safety's "last frontier" and needed to be addressed.

"There are roughly 10,000 deaths a year in the US from rollover crashes – it is huge," he said. "In Australia, we went back through the fatality data and have come up with a figure of somewhere around 25 to 30 per cent of crashes there has been a fatality when the vehicle has rolled over."

"That doesn't necessarily mean the fatality has been caused by the rollover, but it has rolled."

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Police crash investigator calls for 'survivable' 80km/h limit on undivided roads

By JAMES STANFORD

A LEADING Victoria Police road crash investigator has called for the abolition of 100km/h limits on undivided roads.

Speaking at the Society of Automotive Engineers Australasia (SAE-A) Change by Design forum in Melbourne recently, Victoria Police collision reconstruction team leader Peter Bellion said cars travelling at 100km/h in opposite directions with less than a car's length between them were a recipe for disaster.

He said advances in vehicle design meant the chances of surviving an 80km/h impact had



improved greatly, but the forces of an impact at faster speeds meant survival was unlikely due to "complete structural disintegration".

"Even with the most sophisticated car, we can't survive that (above 80km/h), and yet

we still have undivided roads with 100km/h limits and a white line separating you from the oncoming traffic," he said.

"At the weekend a driver was adjusting the radio and all of a sudden (they go) into the oncoming traffic and we have a fatal outcome, just like that."

Sen-Sgt Bellion said there should be more margin for error. "Why do we still have 100km/h limits when someone makes the slightest mistake somebody is going to pay for it with their lives?"

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