

Tata dealers out to 35

Indian brand's reach now extends to key rural areas as 4x4 ute reaches 4 stars

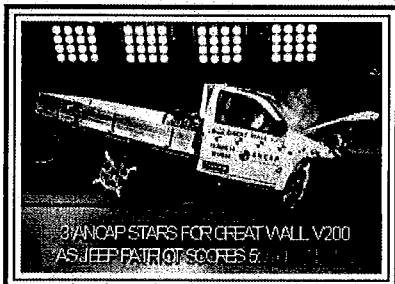
By RICHARD BERRY

TATA Motors' Australian distributor Fusion Automotive has this week confirmed the expansion of its dealer network to 35 locations, just as its Xenon dual cab 4x4 utility is upgraded to a four-star crash safety rating.

Earlier this month, the 4x2 dual cab variant was awarded a four-star rating from the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) – up from a poor two-star result – following the addition of electronic stability control (ESC) and other safety features as standard, and the same rating has now been applied to the 4x4 dual cab.

The news coincides with the announcement of the Indian brand's growing dealer network, with Fusion Automotive managing director Darren Bowler saying new retail outlets now in Tasmania, Tamworth, Mildura and Kempsey were strategically important.

"We kicked off in October last year



with zero brand recognition, zero dealers and for us it was all about building a dealer network that was heading in the direction to be profitable," he said.

"We wanted to make sure our brand representation was strategically laid out across Australia, not just having a dealer for the sake of having a dealer. It was about strategically locating our dealerships in the right places around Australia and we're doing that."

Rural areas are particularly important, and Mr Bowler said the growth in regional areas of Queensland had outstripped metropolitan areas.

"We're building our metro base in Queensland. The rural base has grown a lot quicker," he said.

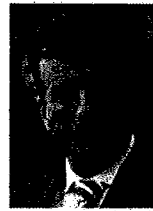
Mr Bowler said the growth was part of Fusion Automotive's 4-year plan, which will see the arrival of more Tata vehicles in Australia, some of which will benefit from Tata's ownership of British premium brand Jaguar Land Rover (JLR).

"The future is very bright," Mr Bowler said.

"As a distributor Fusion Automotive is focused on Tata Motors as a business as a whole, with the ownership of JLR important from a technology point of view for the future.

"It not just about one model for us, it's about establishing a dealer network which is in it for the long haul. It's a brand-building exercise over the short term. But in the longer term there will be a full product range of vehicles that will stretch from light commercial vehicles right through to medium and heavy trucks and passenger vehicles – it'll be all within the next 4 years."

The Xenon is the sole offering for now, but Mr Bowler has big plans for this model, too, as the importer aims to conquer the sub-\$30,000 light commercial vehicle segment.



Darren Bowler

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'An opportunity lost'

Industry has generally not used advances in safety to bolster new-car sales: AAI

By TERRY MARTIN

THE Australian car industry has generally failed to capitalise on the potential of improved vehicle safety to lift sales across the market, according to specialist business and policy consultancy Australian Automotive Intelligence (AAI).

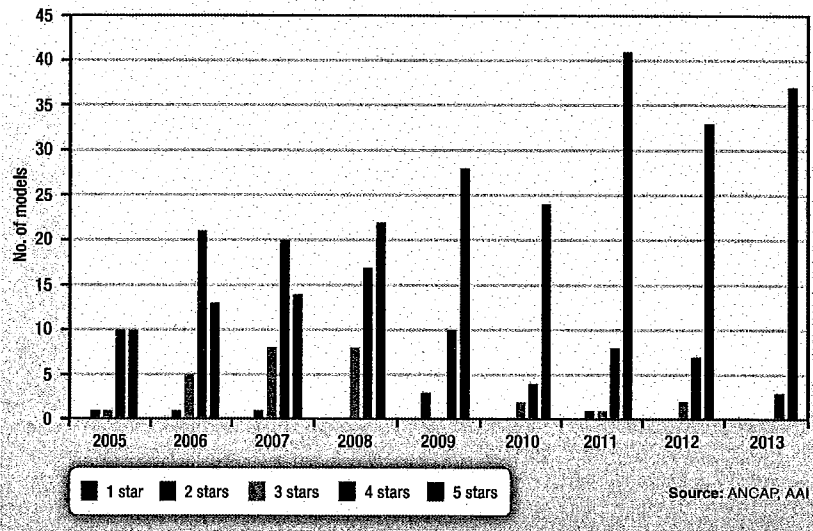
AAI principal Richard Johns has told GoAuto that despite the industry coming to accept the role of the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP), which in turn has led to the early adoption of safety equipment in many vehicles sold on the Australian market, the sales and marketing activities by car companies still tend to deflate safety features and ratings.

"The ANCAP testing regime has clearly elevated the commitment of the automotive industry to raising the safety performance of new vehicles sold in Australia," Mr Johns said.

"Until 2008, less than half of the models tested achieved (the maximum) five-star safety ratings but only three of 40 models failed to meet the more stringent standards required for 2013.

"However, company and model advertising seems to largely relegate safety factors to a dot point in a list of 'features' or a small ANCAP logo in the corner, and the general advertising emphasis largely continues to be on glamour and performance.

ANCAP Safety Ratings – Models by Year of Manufacture



"The industry must still think that safety does not sell – it seems an opportunity lost," he said.

Mr Johns' comments come as Renault Australia – one of the first car companies to advocate the ANCAP regime and promote its five-star-rated models – has questioned the relevance of the local safety authority now that the forthcoming Captur crossover has become ineligible for a maximum rating because it does not have head-protecting airbags for rear occupants fitted standard.

As GoAuto has reported, revised ANCAP criteria introduced on January 1, 2014, requires standard front and rear curtain airbags on all new passenger cars for them to be eligible for a top rating.

The Captur does, however, qualify for five stars under the comparable, but slightly different, European

NCAP testing.

Federal industry minister Ian Macfarlane also recently questioned ANCAP's relevance and the government is reportedly considering whether to continue its funding with the shutdown of Ford's manufacturing operations in 2016 and Toyota and Holden's factory closures a year later.

Mr Johns said design requirements, whether Australian or those from other countries, only set the minimum standard required for vehicles while past ANCAP testing "clearly shows that there are distinct differences between vehicle safety performance and provision, even when all volume vehicles sold in Australia have been required to meet ADRs".

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ANCAP focuses on ESC

Tata Xenon ute two-star rating to climb with ESC standard from mid-2014

By TERRY MARTIN

TATA'S Xenon utility has received a two-star safety rating from the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) – a result described as “poor” by the independent authority but which is expected to improve as soon as electronic stability control (ESC) becomes available on the vehicle.

The Xenon was the only vehicle from the latest round of crash testing to receive less than the maximum five-star result, with the Toyota Kluger, Peugeot 2008, Citroen C4 Grand Picasso and Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV all receiving the highest possible rating.

The Indian-built Xenon was launched late last year without ESC, and importer Fusion Automotive advised at the time that the life-saving safety technology was due to be introduced by January.



Xenon



Xenon

However, Fusion Automotive managing director Darren Bowler told GoAuto last week that the Xenon would now be fitted with ESC – across its entire range – by mid-2014, saying the delay was due to the supply of the ESC system from Bosch.

Not having ESC fitted has limited the Xenon's rating to two stars under ANCAP's current criteria, despite the fact that it performed “fairly well” in the frontal offset crash test, according to the safety watchdog.

While the Xenon's 16-out-of-16 score in the side-impact test (which simulates a crash with a small car) was expected for this type of vehicle, its score of 11.27 out of 16 in the frontal offset test was described by Mr Bowler as “quite outstanding for us”.

“When you look at the competitive set of what other manufacturers have around that, we are very high in that

regard,” he said.

In comparison, the Indian-built Mahindra Pik-Up received a three-star result in 2012 with a frontal offset score of 6.6 out of 16, while the Chinese-built Great Wall V240 tested in 2009 received two stars and managed just 2.36 out of 16 in the frontal test. Neither of these vehicles is available with ESC.

Ford's Ranger, which is among the five-star-rated utes on the market and has a higher level of safety equipment such as side and head-protecting airbags on certain models, scored 15.72 out of 16 when tested in 2011.

“We're working very closely with ANCAP,” Mr Bowler said. “ESC vehicles are in their final stages of certification at the moment and they will be available for sale by the middle of this year.”

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Renault reveals more 'forceful and dynamic' new-generation Traffic van due 2015

By MIKE COSTELLO

RENAULT'S third-generation Traffic mid-sized van will sport a punchy 1.6-litre twin-turbo diesel engine with the performance of a regular 2.0-litre when it arrives in Australia around March 2015.

Now built in France at Renault's renovated Sandouville plant – rather than Britain and Spain as with the current version – the new Traffic you see here is only the third iteration in the model's 34-year history.

The reworked model gets an all-new powertrain and a completely redesigned exterior. Renault will offer two roof heights and two vehicle lengths on European versions, and body styles including delivery van,



crew cab, platform cab and minibus.

Renault Australia has in recent times grown its light commercial fleet substantially, adding various roof heights and body styles to its larger Master model range. Traffic sales grew 160.4 per cent last year, and are up again in 2014.

The current Traffic is limited to a van-only configuration, but in light of

Renault's ambitions to grow its local LCV sales, expect more variants in the next-generation range here.

Expect also to see the new Traffic on a road near you emblazoned in the familiar red-and-white regalia of Australia Post, with the French company last year undercutting Mercedes to win the prized five-year contract. The deal includes both Traffics and Masters.

Renault is keeping full mechanical details under wraps, but says it will offer versions of its new 1.6-litre dCi turbo-diesel engine – one sporting a single variable-geometry turbo and a punchier twin-turbo unit that should produce around 120kW/380Nm.

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China's 'safest' car

Qoros 3 sedan becomes first Chinese car to earn 5 stars from Euro NCAP

By MIKE COSTELLO

A CHINESE-BUILT small sedan last week achieved the highest European NCAP safety score of any vehicle tested in 2013.

The Qoros 3, which is under consideration for Australian sale in the medium-term, attained a near-perfect adult occupant safety score of 95 per cent, more than any other car this year.

Its performance in the areas of child protection (87 per cent), pedestrian protection (77 per cent) and preventative safety assist (81 per cent) was also commended.

It marks a minor watershed moment for China's domestic industry, becoming the first product from a Chinese car-maker to attain the maximum European NCAP score.

The Geely Emgrand EC7 and MG6 had until now set the benchmark with four-star results.



The Shanghai-based start-up brand, founded in 2007, is a 50:50 joint-venture between budget Chinese car-maker Chery and an Israeli investment firm.

It pitches its wares further upmarket than most Chinese brands, having hired numerous European executives from Saab and BMW and commissioning its own unique platform architecture.

It has also inked deals with world-class suppliers such as Magna Steyr, TRW, Continental, Bosch, Microsoft and Iconmobile.

The '3' – not to be confused with Mazda – is marketed as a Volkswagen Jetta rival in Europe, and the ambitious

company is understood to have a hatchback and a crossover SUV in the pipeline.

In its report, Euro NCAP noted that the Qoros' passenger compartment remained stable under frontal impact, with dummy readings showing 'good' protection ratings for the upper body, knees and femur.

It scored the maximum in side barrier testing, 'adequate' chest and abdomen protection in the severe side-impact pole test and good whiplash resistance in the rear-end collision test.

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Rondo joins Kia's growing list of models with top independent crash-test rating

By RON HAMMERTON

KIA has maintained its clean sweep of five-star safety ratings for its new-generation range, gaining a maximum rating for its new Rondo compact people-mover from the European New Car Assessment Program.

Like other fresh Kia models such as Optima, Rio, Cerato, Sportage, Sorento and Soul, the seven-seat Rondo (sold in Europe as the Carens) is now likely to earn the same top rating from the



Australasian NCAP organisation, which frequently adopts the Euro NCAP judgment.

This leaves the larger but aging Kia Carnival – the long-time people-mover sales champion in Australia – as the

only Kia model in the current range not to carry a five-star new-car rating.

In Europe, the Carnival was given four stars in 2006, while it has not been rated by the Australian car safety watchdog, except as a used vehicle.

That is likely to change late next year when an all-new Carnival arrives on global markets, sitting on a new platform designed for five-star safety.

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'These are duds'

Cars considered unsafe for public servants should not be imported here: Chester

By BARRY PARK

AUSTRALIA should consider banning the sale of cars with poor safety records, federal parliament was told last week.

Shadow parliamentary secretary for roads and regional transport, Daren Chester, made the call to ban all volume-selling vehicles from Australia that do not have a three- or four-star crash safety rating in a speech before federal parliament.

He also asked for more to be done "to help reduce the enormous impact of road trauma on our nation".

The National party member for Gippsland said there were vehicles on sale in Australia that the federal government would "not let any public servant drive" because their crash safety fell outside the government's compulsory five-star rating.

"It is my personal view that we should ban the importation of any vehicle sold in volume which does not achieve a minimum three- or, preferably, four-star



ANCAP safety rating," Mr Chester said.

"Right now, we have vehicles on sale in Australia that the federal government would not let any public servant drive but that we are allowing to be imported and driven on our roads.

"In safety terms, these are duds and they should not be on our roads. They may be cheap but they are potentially deadly, and there is no logical reason why we should import vehicles with comparatively low ANCAP (Australasian New Car Assessment Program) safety ratings."

Mr Chester's call could result in passenger cars including the two-star Chery J11 compact SUV, and the

three-star Chery J1 small hatchback, disappearing from the Australian automotive landscape.

Mr Chester said banning poor-performing cars from sale would send a message to car-makers worldwide to make improvements in crash safety.

"We should be telling the international vehicle manufacturing market that we will not tolerate the importation of such vehicles in the future," he said.

"We should give the manufacturers fair warning and ban the importation of these vehicles as soon as possible."

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Green light for Iso x - next page

Volkswagen responds to customer concerns with offer of free inspection at dealers

By MIKE COSTELLO

VOLKSWAGEN Australia announced last week that it is offering free inspections to all owners with concerns that their vehicle may have reliability problems.

The offer, which came almost a week after a scathing series of media reports, is asking owners to visit a Volkswagen dealership for free inspections—although it does not outline what Volkswagen's



service technicians will look for.

In an open letter to customers, cross-posted on the company's Facebook site, Volkswagen Group Australia managing

director John White said safety was a priority for the car-maker since it first sold cars in Australia.

"For 60 years, the safety and peace of mind of Australians has been our highest priority. We continue to stand by the quality of our cars and the integrity of our engineering excellence in meeting this responsibility," Mr White said.

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