



Inquiry into the Process of Development, Adoption and Implementation of Australian Design Rules

Report of the Road Safety Committee on
the Inquiry into the Process of
Development, Adoption and
Implementation of Australian Design
Rules

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

Victorian Government Printer 2009

Parliament of Victoria
Road Safety Committee
Subject Australian Design Rules
ISBN - 978-0-9751534-8-2

Chair's Foreword

The vehicles we once drove compared to what we drive now have come a long way. Our expectations of what we drive have also changed. We now want our driving to be a pleasure and we want it to be safe and not just get us from point A to point B.

Thanks to consumer demand, tough love legislation and innovative people in the industry, vehicle design and technology have produced a quantum leap in the safety of most vehicles on our roads today, compared with those of less than two decades ago.

Some of these life saving technologies, such as Electronic Stability Control, have the potential to deliver reductions in road trauma comparable to the introduction of seat belt wearing legislation in the 1960's.

Regrettably, the current revolution in vehicle safety has largely coincided with a period of stagnation in the national regulations which are meant to govern the safety of new vehicles sold in this country – the Australian Design Rules.

Since the Commonwealth Government assumed control of the Australian Design Rules in 1989, the system has delayed or prevented the introduction of a number of new safety features and technologies in this country.

As a consequence, there has been a widening in the gap between the safety of new vehicles sold in Australia compared with leading European jurisdictions. The fact that the current Australian Design Rules is equivalent to an Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) rating of only 1.3 stars exacerbates the problem and is very concerning.

Fortunately the market forces, including consumer programs, are an increasingly important tool for improving the safety of the vehicles on our roads.

This is evident by the fact that up to 85 per cent of new vehicles sold in Australia are now awarded four or five star ratings by ANCAP. This is because motorists are increasingly aware of the risks of serious injury or death in a vehicle that achieves a low star rating.

However, while market forces are a necessary part of the vehicle safety prescription, they are not sufficient. An effective vehicle regulatory system should have the capacity to consolidate the gains achieved in vehicle safety. Unfortunately, it is clear that the current system cannot even prevent the future erosion of existing gains.

This is well illustrated by the current risk of significant market penetration by relatively unsafe vehicles from emerging manufacturers under the Australian Design Rules. The issue is far from academic, as is illustrated by the one star rating recently given to the Proton Jumbuck and the two star rating given to Great Wall's SA220 and V240 models. It is very disappointing that the Australian Design Rules have failed to prevent the entry of these vehicles to the Australian market.

Accordingly I believe that at the very least, the Federal Government should reconsider its policy of incentives/rebates being available on vehicles with such low safety ratings.

Victorian drivers, passengers and pedestrians, indeed all Australians, have every right to be disappointed that their regulatory system has failed them so badly.

The current Australian Design Rules system also exacerbates a social inequity that should be an embarrassment to all Australians. It is well known that many of our more vulnerable drivers, including the young, the elderly and those of limited means, are more likely to drive less expensive vehicles which, given the minimal nature of the Australian Design Rules, are likely to be significantly less safe in the event of a crash.

Safety should not be compromised on the basis of socio-economic circumstances.

The Road Safety Committee has made a number of recommendations that I believe will significantly raise the bar represented by the standards of the current Australian Design Rules and will create consultative arrangements to ensure that the standards are more responsive to technological advances in the future.

I am pleased to present this report on the Australian Design Rules. As with the Committee's 2008 report on Vehicle Safety, the recommendations contained in this report have the sole aim of reducing fatalities and injuries on our roads and of lessening the terrible societal and personal burden of road trauma.

Finally I would like to thank my Parliamentary colleagues on this Committee for their genuine commitment and bi-partisan approach in preparing this report. Their collegiate approach throughout the inquiry continues a proud tradition of this very important Committee. Also, of course, I thank the dedicated staff of the Committee for their hard work in the preparation of this report; namely our Executive Officer Ms Alexandra Douglas, Research Officer Mr Nathan Bunt and Office Manager Ms Kate Woodland.

John Eren, MLA
Chair