

The Hindu Business Line

Wednesday- August 23-2023

‘For a country to lead in exports, you need to follow global best practices’

Global New Car Assessment Programme (Global NCAP) is a well known project of the Towards Zero Foundation, a UK-registered non-for-profit organisation. It released the first-ever independent crash test results of five popular compact cars sold in the Indian market, starting their popular ‘Safer Cars for India’ project, in January 2014.

Since then, many original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in India have been hostile to them as their cars failed badly with some even getting ‘Zero’ ratings in those crash tests. But, in the recent years, OEMs like Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra and Skoda Auto India achieved ‘5 Star’ ratings for their ‘Made in India’ passenger vehicles for not only drivers, but also co-passengers. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has now developed its Bharat NCAP with partnership with none other than GNCAP, which will be operational from October 1.



LIVE

Get Our Exclusive Share Market Live Coverage

In an interview with *businessline*, David Ward, Executive President, Towards Zero Foundation, and the man behind all the NCAPs around the world said that the Indian market is very sophisticated and very interesting too. Edited excerpts:

**What will be the nature of the MoU which you signed with the Indian government?**

It's just a general cooperation. Global NCAP is like a family, cooperating with all the different NCAPs of the world and now we have now 10, including India. The US was the first, then Japan, Australia, Euro NCAP, China, South Korean, Latin America and ASEAN. It's a good opportunity to encourage dialogue and cooperation between the NCAPs. Next year, in April, we have a World Congress of NCAPs in Germany. It rotates, and we do it every other year. This will be an opportunity for Bharat NCAP to have dialogue with other NCAPs... but in the end, with each NCAP, we don't tell them what to do. We are just a platform for cooperation. Each NCAP is autonomous and they do their own thing. They are not all the same due to different reasons to do with market conditions, and so on.

Q

**India is just beginning to do what other countries have already started long back. What is your perspective towards Indian automobile market and such tests?**

For India to have its programme, I would say it's very early days. But who knows, five years from now when they are adopting the protocol, they may be doing things like ASEAN NCAP, by doing things completely unique. I also agree with Minister Nitin Gadkari that there is always a balance between being unique and adopting global practices, and for a country which wants to be leading the world with exports, you need to keep an eye on what's global best practice because that's really a gateway into these markets. So, NCAPs are really dynamic because they can constantly change the goalposts as we move along, in response to technology and market conditions.

When I first came here in 2013-14, I was told there is no interest in airbags in this country. Nobody wants to buy a car with airbags. And, I said to them, 'are you really sure, because you never told anybody about it.' In the meantime, after our original first crash test results, it immediately changed the nature of discussion about airbags, and manufacturers started spontaneously started saying 'we will make airbags standard', which of course they were already

doing in all the major markets. So they knew perfectly well about what's the significance of airbags.

The Indian consumer market is very sophisticated... you have all the ingredients to spread messages quickly, and that is why you saw really rapid programmes. That is the nature when the technology is changing/advancing... that's a very powerful set of ingredients.

Q

**How is Bharat NCAP different from NCAPs globally? Isn't it different when it comes to speed because Indian cars are being tested with lesser speed?**

Some of it is very detailed and that's how you award points for different things. India has the same speed in terms of regulatory tests, which is the same as the UN regulatory standard. That was originally an EU standard which is still in place.

The EU regulation today is 56 kmph (for crash tests). But, NCAPs around the world use 64 kmph and the reason for the higher test speed is because that's the typical speed where fatal injuries occur. The original 56 kmph speed in certain regulation was a kind of compromised choice that wasn't based well. The case for 64 kmph is to do with the fatality risks... NCAPs are not comparing performance between manufacturers — they are not pass or fail — so the 56 kmph was like a basic Yes or No/pass or fail. But, 64 kmph allows you to show the overall difference and is more dynamic. So, except India, it is 64 kmph across all NCAPs.

Q

**On the Indian perspective, many manufacturers were still against putting more airbags because of the cost factor. For instance, top passenger car maker Maruti Suzuki once said they are not supposed to make tanks...**

Nobody wants tanks. Tanks are really bad... arguably they are very large SUVs. Look at what's happening in pedestrians deaths in the US. So, we want to avoid that. In fact, the alignment around 64 kpmh is the normal best practice... so we don't need to build the tanks to pass that test.