

NEWS

Crash tests on mini-cars show small is vulnerable

By Paul Marston, Transport Correspondent

SAFETY weaknesses in seven of the most popular small cars were revealed yesterday after tests of their ability to withstand serious collisions.

In the first publicly reported assessment of "crashworthiness", none of the seven achieved the highest four-star rating described as "desirable" by the Transport Research Laboratory, which conducted the trials.

The tests were designed to simulate accidents under conditions more severe than the 28-year-old standards which manufacturers must pass before they can put new models on sale.

The worst performer was the Rover 100, the former Metro, which gained only one star. In the front-on crash at 40mph its passenger compartment suffered "excessive intrusion and instability" with the pillar at the side of the windscreen

pushed in 19 inches and the driver's door split.

The steering wheel shot 12 inches towards the driver — a rubber-skinned dummy fitted with sensors — causing the head to miss the airbag and strike the pillar.

According to the Consumers' Association, the driver would probably have died.

In the 30mph side-impact, head protection was good but the driver's chest and abdomen were vulnerable.

The Fiat Punto, Nissan Micra, Renault Clio and the Vauxhall Corsa merited two stars.

The Punto and Clio were marked down for poor airbag performance.

The Micra provided limited defence for the driver's lower body, while the Corsa offered the least security for the passenger's head.

The Ford Fiesta earned three stars, but was criticised for the large backward



End of the road: the Rover 100's passenger compartment suffered 'excessive instability' in a front-on crash

movement of the steering wheel in the frontal crash.

Volkswagen's Polo also got three stars but was found to have dangerous vertical intrusion of the steering wheel and poor chest protection in the side-on collision.

The cars were also taken to task for the inadequacy of their child safety equipment.

Despite using the manufacturer's recommended child seat in each case, analysts found that, in frontal crashes, they did not sufficiently restrain the child dummy's upper body. In the

side-impacts, the dummy's head moved beyond the sides of the seat in all vehicles except the Polo.

When it came to the danger to pedestrians, the laboratory, based at Crowthorne, Berks, and funded by the Government, motoring organisations and consumer groups, found that in all but one of the 25mph tests, the head injuries were likely to have been fatal.

The RAC greeted the results as "an historic event for road safety". Neil Johnson, chief executive, said:

"Motorists will for the first time be able to make an informed choice of car on grounds of safety rather than colour and performance."

John Bowis, junior transport minister, said tests on further classes of cars during the next 18 months would lead to "irresistible pressure" on manufacturers to increase safety.

Despite recent improvements, more than 1,500 car occupants and 700 pedestrians were killed each year. The Society of Motor Manufacturers questioned the

tests, saying that most accidents occurred at speeds of less than 40mph.

However, the laboratory said only two per cent of accidents involved fatalities, so tests intended to reduce the death toll had to be severe.

Rover said publication of the results would distort the market.

Stricter test standards come into force next year. Similar in format to the laboratory exercise, they will involve the same side-on speed, but a lower speed of 35mph for frontal collisions.

How the test cars compare

Star ratings (out of four): ★ Overall ★ Pedestrian safety

Protection ratings: Good Adequate Marginal Weak Poor

| | HEAD | CHEST | MIDRIF | LEGS | FEET |
|--|------|----------|----------|------|------|
| Ford Fiesta: On-road price £9,945 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| VW Polo: £8,845 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Vauxhall Corsa: £9,100 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Renault Clio: £8,375 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Nissan Micra: £8,450 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Fiat Punto: £7,436 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Rover 100: £7,436 ★★ ★★ ★ | | | | | |
| Front impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| passenger | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |
| Side impact: driver | Good | Adequate | Marginal | Weak | Poor |

Source: Department of Transport Left side Right side

WPC 'thrown to ground by colleague'

By Michael Fleet

A POLICEWOMAN claimed at an industrial tribunal yesterday that she was hurled to the ground by a male officer while patrolling a pop festival.

Pc Kay Kellaway, 34, said she was called a "whore, slag and a bitch" as she and acting Insp Martin Thomas worked at the Reading Festival. She claimed it was part of a catalogue of insults and abuse from other officers.

She is suing Thames Valley Police for sexual discrimination after she claims she was blocked from becoming a sergeant. She has been on sick leave and has said she took an overdose

Pillboxes to be listed for posterity

By Tim Butcher
Defence Correspondent

MORE than 500,000 defence sites — ranging from Cold War radar complexes to one-man concrete bunkers — are to be listed under a scheme awarded £250,000 of lottery money yesterday.

Half of the estimated £500,000 cost of the Defence of Britain project is to be paid from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

The money will allow military historians and enthusiastic amateurs to build a comprehensive database of all buildings, facilities and sites built this century for defence.

They include pillboxes,

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