

Andrew Miller

Euro NCAP President | 2014 – 2017

Andrew Miller has been Chief Technical Officer at Thatcham Research until June 2017. At Thatcham he was on the Council of the Road Safety Foundation and Steering Committee member of the Research Council for Automotive Repairs [RCAR].

WINNING THE MOTOR INDUSTRY'S TRUST

A highly pragmatic approach to road safety – and an intrinsic understanding of the political and strategic challenges faced by the motor industry – have characterised Andrew Miller's period as Euro NCAP President.

The story goes back to the early 1980s, when Miller began working in body engineering for Jaguar, in Coventry.

"Right from the get-go I was an automotive engineer and it was all about building cars which are a great product, that most of us enjoy," says Miller. "Right up until the time that I joined Thatcham Research, I was engaged directly in the manufacture and design of vehicles. I was working on exterior trim and hardware and the first car I worked on was the XJS Convertible, which shows how old I am!"

Later on, says Miller, at both Thatcham Research and NCAP, his personal experience of working inside the car industry – not just at Jaguar but also with other

suppliers – gave him the inside track on what 'really makes car companies tick'. "It meant I understood the people we were trying to influence and work with; I understood their thought processes and the challenges they faced."

In practical terms, when Euro NCAP started formulating its highly successful Roadmap – that would shape crash test and vehicle safety evaluation for years to come – Miller found that his affinity with former motor industry colleagues stood him in good stead.

"At that important time, in 2009, I would be sitting at the table with motor industry safety directors and hearing their views on the Roadmap. I was able to understand where they were coming from," says Miller, who firmly believes his awareness of motor industry executives' positions, their responsibilities and to whom they were accountable, supported Euro NCAP in winning the motor industry's trust.





"We wanted safer cars. For them it was about the dynamics bound up with the motor industry; meeting targets, building a vehicle to a price and meeting a product specification in an extremely competitive environment," says Miller.

"When I joined Euro NCAP, some parts of the industry still did not want to hear the message. There were 'good guys' and 'bad guys,'" says Miller. "Those that wanted to get on, because it was a big part of their mission statement or DNA - and those that didn't. Some manufacturers said they wanted safe cars - but only at a price."

Miller was also driven by a personal vision, however. "Being part of something like Euro NCAP, you're on the side of the angels, working out how to bring the best safety to bear for the consumer. For me it was a strong personal mission to bring about change."

Underpinning his desire for enhanced safety was a strong commitment to support Euro NCAP's executive, financially and corporately, making it easier for them to do their jobs. "It's an important part of the role," reflects Miller.

It was when discussions about the Roadmap gathered pace that Miller observed Euro NCAP's relationship with the motor industry improving significantly. "Fundamentally, that created a much better dialogue," says Miller. "It was helpful for the industry to have a Roadmap looking five, or seven-plus years ahead."

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For the industry it's never thinking about this year, or the current model, it's thinking about the one after that and it represents a massive global investment.

"By building those Roadmaps, as a board, we helped the industry see what was coming, giving them more faith in us, allowing us to work with them towards key safety objectives."

Miller says he always wanted the 'right stuff to happen'. "We were obviously going to be lifting the bar on safety, we were not going to sit back and say good enough is good enough. It's all about best practice. It means that if one car maker has a new technology and we rate it highly because it improves safety, it becomes the new benchmark."

"By listing that in the Roadmap we create the right dialogue. We could say to them: 'You know you want to achieve five stars and these are the steps you need to take to achieve that. And we could point to other car companies that had done that.'"

Asked to name some of the 'good guys' in the earlier days, Miller points to Volvo, Mercedes, Renault and Ford. "But really, after the introduction of the Roadmap, the whole industry was improving."

AUTONOMOUS AND CITY DRIVING AIDS

Other vitally important areas that Miller continued to oversee as President were the introduction of new driver assistance systems, the stepping stones towards autonomous driving. He also oversaw the seeds of integration between Euro NCAP and Australasian NCAP, which 'goes live' in 2018. "There was a lot of work there," says Miller. "It was a 'big international scope change'."

Miller says autonomous and city driving aids were 'one of the biggest things to hit safety and vehicle engineering', and that Euro NCAP had to consider the additional strain this would place on resources. "We were also getting approaches about other vehicle

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types - quadricycles, powered two wheelers, along with discussions about trucks and buses," says Miller. "There was a lot of scope for expansion."

He believes that as the industry moves closer to fully autonomous driving, Euro NCAP will find itself centre-stage, building on its years of research and experience in this arena - particularly the human machine interface (HMI) - to become a consumer reference of expert knowledge.

"We are spending an enormous amount of time looking at this," says Miller: "Humans are just so bad at driving, we're dreadful. You're putting a human in a system and then relying on that human not to fail and of course they just do. They fall asleep, get distracted... we are the weakest link in the whole system. I like diving, like anybody, but it is a high risk situation."

Adds Miller: "This is a really important area now, looking at how, in Level 3, when a car asks the driver to take over again when they are doing something else; it's an enormously complex thing for the consumer to manage. The average consumer can't be distracted for more than a few seconds, and go back to driving safely. We are not great at staying focused on things and here we are creating the opportunity for the vehicle to drive itself, and to increase that level

of disengagement... with the risk that the driver does not re-engage quickly enough when asked to do so."

Miller says that one of Euro NCAP's key roles is to examine and understand this growing challenge. "Euro NCAP's work on this will be a really important piece of work, the first real independent guide."

A GREENER NCAP

His other vision for the future? A 'green' NCAP. "Look back at the massive impact Euro NCAP has had on vehicle safety: an accepted system at European level, which has had a massive impact on car makers. Imagine a similar environmental system, independently and scientifically designed, with its own star rating system."

"We are faced with lots of serious problems; air quality problems, diesel being thrown out as a fuel source because of particulates emissions, CO2 problems across the planet, low acceptance of battery cars. Something that looks at these issues in detail with top world scientists and that comes up with an accepted system could be a really important tool for achieving lifelong changes."

"It is - potentially - another Euro NCAP, all over again..."

