

Claes Tingvall

Euro NCAP President | 2004 – 2010

Professor Claes Tingvall is retired from the Swedish Transport Administration where he was Director of Traffic Safety until July 2015. He was involved in developing Vision Zero from day one, important work for which he has been awarded the Gold Medal from the Swedish Engineering Society. Today Claes Tingvall is Senior Consultant at ÅF Technical Consultants in Sweden.

FIGHTING FOR A CAUSE

As the father of 'Vision Zero' and the man who – against all the odds – introduced Sweden's controversial, life-saving '2 + 1' road layout while Traffic Safety Director at the Swedish Road Administration, Claes Tingvall always was accustomed to fighting for a cause.

But even he was surprised by the level of opposition from the motor industry when, together with a team of safety professionals, he began the struggle to launch what would eventually become Euro NCAP, in the mid-1990s.

For Claes, now aged 63, it all began when he became heavily involved in compiling the official Car Safety Ratings for motor insurer Folksam, swiftly uncovering vast variations in safety offered by different manufacturers' cars.

"Several of us, in Sweden and beyond, were realising that while regulation of the European car industry was necessary, giving everyone a set of rules, it was doing nothing to drive development or to encourage manufacturers to compete in the field of safety," says Claes, who is keen to attribute Euro NCAP's achievements to teamwork.

"It became obvious that the market was a scary thing for car manufacturers and it was easier for them to play safe. It became equally clear however that our mission was to harness powerful market and consumer forces to drive technology and safety forward, while carrying the motor manufacturers and politicians along with us."





GIVING BIRTH

Looking back, Claes says it was a 'crucial' stage in the birth of Euro NCAP when he approached the UK's Transport Department for support - and helped enlist key figures such as the Transport Research Laboratory's Adrian Hobbs, who had envisaged 'the first embryo of Euro NCAP' and already carried out crash tests on the first batch of supermini cars.

"We thought of going it alone in Sweden but we would have been too small," says Claes. "So when the UK government said it would come on board it was a crucial moment. They said that with Sweden's help and that of the FIA and figures such as Max Mosley, they could see a way ahead, effectively giving birth to NCAP."

The next vital step was to replace as many vehicles in the car fleet as quickly as possible - with newer, safer ones, says Claes. "We had to get it right, as the new cars would be on the roads for 15 or more years. Even now, one of the best things Europe could do - theoretically of course - would be to scrap all cars built before 2008 and replace them with new models. You would probably halve the death toll overnight."

Persuading the car manufacturers of the need for change, however, was another matter. "We knew it would be a bumpy road," says Claes. "Apart from one or two who came to us secretly, they were not even

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lukewarm about our aims. They were very nervous about interference in the market - the customer could suddenly decide to go somewhere else."

Euro NCAP's big challenge, says Claes, was to push ahead with its controversial new crash-test programme - and wait for a winner to emerge. "Manufacturers could handle criticism, at least in the short term," says Claes. "They would say 'oh this test isn't relevant or that test is wrong'. What they could not handle was love! We needed a car-maker to break ranks, someone whose car would perform better than all the others in our new tests. If they were told 'you did a really good job' it would become a drug; they'd want more of it! The car industry would no longer be a united club."

The breakthrough arrived in the form of Volvo's S40 which, in the second round of NCAP results, outperformed its rivals. Volvo triumphantly marketed its success. "It was a fantastic story," says Claes. "A vital turning point for Euro NCAP"

"In the car industry it's a battle between those working on environmental issues, and the drive train, the marketing people and so on," says Claes. "In the early days Euro NCAP was successful partly because it empowered those working on safety, by voicing consumers' concerns. Eventually even the marketing people saw that if Volvo were advertising their four stars - and getting sensational media coverage - they had to too!"

MOVING FORWARD

Looking back on his role as chairman at Euro NCAP, Claes says it was vital that the new crash-test regime did not 'destroy' the market. "We did not want to make the 5* car too difficult to achieve so that no one could afford to go all the way. It was a balancing act."

Reflects Claes: "At the end of the day it's not Euro NCAP who created the good cars, it's the industry. But Euro NCAP created the climate and conditions in

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which it could occur, stimulating customers and fleet buyers to make the best possible choices."

Claes is characteristically modest about his role as past chairman, but admits that one of his strengths was calling on his PhD in Medical Science and his expertise in epidemiology, along with his governmental and safety research backgrounds, to 'bring the right people together'. "Sometimes I returned from meetings with a tremendous headache, but we became an organisation with professional processes."

Claes says that today's big challenge, for Euro NCAP, is keeping up with technology. "With driverless cars around the corner, safety is going to be just as important as ever and more will happen in the next few years than in the past 100.

"Euro NCAP will have the courage to continue doing what it's always done - daring to write the specifications, saying which direction we should go in, even if this involves an automated car that drives itself to your front door and takes you to your destination."

He insists: "Euro NCAP knows better than anybody else in Europe about how to deliver progress in relationship with the car industry, to ensure safety keeps moving forward. That is why Euro NCAP will always matter."

