



SPEECH TO #NCAP40 CELEBRATORY DINNER HOSTED BY GLOBAL NCAP

**BY JOAN CLAYBROOK, FORMER ADMINISTRATOR,
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Eindhoven, The Netherlands June 11, 2019**



First, I want to thank David Ward for his incredible advancement of New Car Assessment Programmes (NCAP) across the world with determination and skill. He has raised essential funds, strategized with country leaders to build enthusiasm, proven the crash testing programme enhances safety, publicized crash test results good and bad, persuaded one country after another to adopt NCAP to educate consumers before they buy a new vehicle, and forced auto companies to design in safety.

In 2011 David founded Global NCAP, an award winning entity to encourage cooperation among all NCAP programmes, share best practices, and support vehicle testing in emerging markets. He has far exceeded his initial goals, with much more to come, and deserves our deepest appreciation and support.

My work in inaugurating NCAP at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 1979, forty years ago, was small by comparison. We wanted to challenge the auto companies to stretch beyond the standard 30 mph

crash test. But the air bag safety rule with its 30 mph test had just been issued in July 1977 after ten controversial years so it was not possible politically to increase the safety standard's crash test speed in the near future.

One of NHTSA's talented engineers, Jim Hackney, and his boss Ken Digges, who is here tonight and who managed NHTSA's crash testing research programme, suggested we crash test vehicles at 35 mph and release the results to the public, simply putting consumer pressure on the reluctant and resistant auto companies.

I had served as special assistant to auto safety icon William Haddon, Jr., MD, NHTSA's first administrator, who did the first NHTSA crash tests just before he was dismissed by President Richard Nixon in February 1969. New crash tests were then prohibited by the Nixon White House.

I loved the idea of crash tests to inform consumers. The need for such a programme was solidified by my conversation in the Spring of 1978 with General Motors President, Pete Estes, who admitted to me that his company tested its vehicles for compliance with 30-mph safety standards at only 31 mph. I was shocked. Due to variations in manufacturing, I presumed all manufacturers were testing their vehicles at 4 to 5 mph above the minimum standard so that no vehicle would fall below the standard. But I was dead wrong. Apparently the manufacturers didn't fear that NHTSA would catch them violating the relatively new crash test safety standards. I never did tell Mr. Estes how he spurred me to initiate our 35 mph test NCAP programme! But tonight you are the first to know about his contribution as I toast GM's Pete Estes — a godfather of US NCAP!

We didn't have any funding for this effort in 1979, but didn't want to delay moving ahead for another fiscal year, so we "redirected" safety standard enforcement funds. We conducted all our enforcement crash tests at 35 mph. If the vehicle complied we had the results for standard compliance and NCAP testing. If it didn't, we did a second 30 mph compliance test.

We immediately learned that U. S. smaller cars were much safer than Japanese small cars that were selling like hot cakes in the US because of their superior fuel economy. At the 1978 Paris Experimental Safety Vehicle Conference I arranged a luncheon with all the Japanese manufacturer representatives to warn them that their vehicles tested poorly at 35 mph and that we were going to release the information to the public by make and model. First, there was awestruck silence. Then whispers in Japanese. Then expressions of horror. Then the crucial question: when would the data be released. Almost immediately the Japanese companies took NCAP seriously and significantly improved the safety of their vehicles.

In the early Spring of 1979 NHTSA held a huge press conference in the outdoor courtyard of the US DOT building in Washington D.C. revealing the results of a number of crash tested 1978 vehicles and specifically comparing similar class US-made and Japanese-made vehicles. The Japanese auto officials were prepared with statements about how they were upgrading their vehicles, given their inadequate performance in the 35 mph crash tests.

This reaction showed the early success of NCAP. I could not have asked for anything more! NCAP, in its first public release, was hitting home runs. Given its revolutionary impact we decided it had to become permanent with its own name. We settled on "New Car Assessment Programme" (NCAP), a modest non-controversial name for a very controversial consumer information programme.

It was soon very clear that we had to publish the crash test information by make and model for public consumption. None of the top agency staff thought this project was feasible but I was resolute. The public needed the information. Luckily, NHTSA's chief administrative officer unearthed a young NHTSA staffer named Jack Gillis, with a masters degree in marketing, in our fuel economy office. With the help of an outside contractor, Gillis produced a slick, informative 68 page booklet named "The Car Book", listing all the crash test data by make and model, with additional safety information.

To assure it was launched effectively, I asked the popular national television host Phil Donohue if I could appear on his nationwide TV show with its millions of viewers and offer "The Car Book" free of charge to his audience. He immediately said "Yes!". So did his viewers. 450,000 of them requested a copy, many, many more than we anticipated. It was the largest response to the release of any government report in the history of the US

The US auto industry was so furious its leaders personally visited my boss, the US Secretary of Transportation, in Washington D.C. to complain. I was called on the carpet. The Secretary was an imposing figure with a commanding personality. He demanded an explanation. I knew this was a "make or break" moment for NCAP. I could not back down. I told him NHTSA routinely made crash test data publicly available. But "The Car Book" made it easy to

distribute the data and easy for consumers to understand it. The Secretary then said I should have notified him in advance. I replied his office had approved NHTSA's press release, which he obviously never read. He scowled but that was it. The idea of producing and promoting car crash test information was too powerful to quash, and the immediate demand for it proved it a huge success.

That was the good news. The bad news was that a new government was installed when President Ronald Reagan was elected in November 1980, I lost my job, and my successor as Administrator (a former coal lawyer), stopped publishing "The Car Book". But he was fearful about stopping the wildly popular DOT crash test information for consumers to this day. The Car Book author, Jack Gillis, quit his DOT job, risking everything to privately publish, with the non-profit Center for Auto Safety, the second edition of "The Car Book". They have published it each year since, with the 39th edition hitting the news stands earlier this year, and it is now on the web as well.

The next 14 years were hollow ones for US NCAP. No new tests were applied to the NCAP programme, although with model year 1983 light trucks and vans were covered. Finally, in the 1990's, the Clinton administration added the Star Rating system with five stars being best. In 1997 the first NCAP ratings for side impact tests were added, then upgraded in 2010 and 2016. And the NCAP programme finally got a distinct budget from Congress.

As NCAP gained recognition, the auto companies started advertising safety, referencing NCAP but usually only when the tests results complimented their vehicles. The auto companies like meager US NCAP measurements because they can more readily boast about exceeding its tests. But at least after years of denial, the companies finally admitted that safety sells, another solid NCAP victory.

A major improvement in US NCAP occurred in 2000, just before President George Bush was elected, and it was solely because of pressure from consumer advocates lobbying Congress. We secured a key congressional mandate in the 2000 TREAD Act enacted in response to hundreds of deaths in rollover prone Ford Explorers with defective Firestone tires. At that time, about 10,000 Americans were killed in rollover crashes. The Tread Act required NHTSA to conduct dynamic rollover consumer information tests for cars and light trucks as part of NCAP. The auto manufacturers got the message and within ten years the rollover deaths dropped dramatically— by almost one-third.

Five years later as part of consumer supported legislation requiring NHTSA to issue safety standards for rollover prevention and also crash protection, Republican Senator Mike DeWine (now Governor of Ohio) added a requirement at the request of consumer groups that NCAP information must be listed on the legally required vehicle price sticker on the window of all new cars. This mandate vastly enhances the access of consumers to NCAP information at the point of sale, something I believe no other country requires. It is crucial because auto dealers rarely provide NCAP information to new car buyers.

In 2004, NHTSA upgraded its web page and launched safercar.gov that assists consumers' search for essential information about vehicle safety in one place, including NCAP, and road safety data. Although a welcome tool, there still are many gaps and much room for improvement.

In 2010 the five star ratings were enhanced with the addition of an overall rating score in US NCAP along with suggested advanced safety technologies a car buyer should consider in making a purchase. These technologies were quite new so no new government NCAP requirements were issued for them.

But that was almost ten years ago, and sadly, neither these nor proposed upgrades in US NCAP, announced with great fanfare in 2015, have been adopted.

As a result, with tears in our eyes, we have to admit that the once proud US NCAP programme has fallen shamefully behind most other mature NCAP programmes, such as Euro NCAP, initiated 27 years after the US programme. Under the current Trump administration we have no expectation of improvements. We must now wait until at least 2021 and a possible change of administrations, to upgrade US NCAP's gross inadequacies.

Examples of needed upgrades in US tests to match the current Euro NCAP Programme include:

- Frontal offset deformable barrier
- Rear whiplash
- Child occupant crash protection
- Rear seat belt reminders
- Pedestrian/biker impact protection

- Forward collision warning
- Automatic emergency braking
- Speed assistance systems
- Lane departure warning

Putting this long list of requirements and others such as rollover crash protection into US NCAP will take time, resources and leadership. But included in this list are some of the most exciting developments in recent automotive history. For years, to avoid liability and calls from government and consumers for safer cars, the auto manufacturers blamed the driver for auto crashes and the resultant deaths and injuries.

They coined phrases such as “The life you save will be your own”, and “the nut behind the wheel”.

But in the last 15 years automotive engineering genius has developed electronic systems to assist drivers in slowing or stopping their vehicles to avoid frontal or rear crashes, keep the vehicle in its traffic lane, detect blind spots, and prevent rollovers. Just as the engineers designed crash protection systems such as airbags in the 1960’s through 1990’s, that operate automatically, they are now tackling automatic systems to prevent crashes. This is a fabulous development for highway users!

In addition to incorporating tests of these crash avoidance systems into new vehicle safety standards, NCAP tests above the level of new standards must be created.

To assure they are effective in pushing manufacturers, comparisons on the web by make and model are essential, as is constant publicity about where to find the NCAP information. And the American system for an informative window sticker listing NCAP results on all new cars and light trucks in the dealer showrooms should be adopted worldwide.

Fortunately, given the meager state of the US NCAP programme, other organizations funded by US property and casualty insurers are providing substantial support in promoting such consumer awareness and protection in the US Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (a group I helped to found and whose long time former president Judie Stone is here tonight as is its Chief Engineer Shaun Kildare) has fought in Congress for funding for US NCAP and for increasing its scope. It also badgers NHTSA to issue new NCAP requirements.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), a research and communications group also supported by US property and casualty insurers, assesses the safety performance of vehicles in crashes through its extensive research and testing programmes and rates vehicle performance, often more stringently than US NCAP, putting pressure on manufacturers and informing consumers.

But the US NCAP programme is crucial as a government publicly- funded measure of the auto industry’s compliance with meaningful crash tests adopted with the opportunity for the public to comment and critique. And the motor vehicle industry needs to be held accountable by its regulators not only for compliance with vehicle safety standards but also higher NCAP tests.

As we push for improvements in US NCAP, we must be mindful as Global NCAP urges, that the successful strategies in higher income countries of “regulatory push” and “demand pull” that have saved hundreds of thousands of lives now must also be applied with vigor and resources in low and middle income countries. These countries account now for 90 % of total road deaths and are the target market for vast vehicle population increases, where sub-standard vehicles lacking air bags, anti-lock brakes and electronic stability control are often sold—violating the United Nations minimum safety standards for vehicle standard equipment. In short, we have major hurdles to overcome, but with past successes we know the drill and how to do this job. But of course support from countries represented here tonight is essential.

In closing, I want to add a personal note of sincere gratitude to those of you here tonight who have been doing the pioneering work for NCAP in your countries. In 1979 I never imagined that this idea born in the minds of a few imaginative engineers would have the reach it does today. I thank and support you in this hard and important work.

And thank you again David Ward, for your unwavering leadership and fierce determination. I accept your recognition not only on behalf of myself but all those at NHTSA and the public interest auto safety groups supporting NCAP.