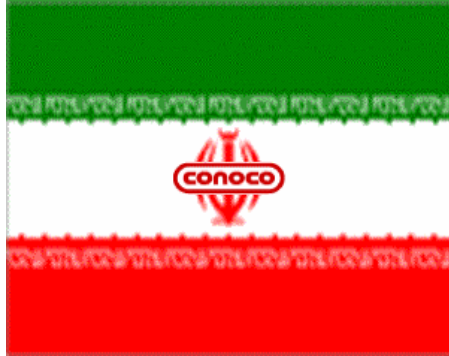




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**Accident Avoidance is Key**

Written by **Bengt Halvorson**

When shopping for the safest vehicle that meets your needs, keep in mind that avoiding a crash in the first place is the best option. How well a vehicle handles and responds to a quick emergency maneuver could be the difference between life and death.

Automakers are responding quickly to concerns over the safety of SUVs and their greater likelihood of rollover with design changes that bring down the center of mass so that they're not as tipsy. Electronic stability control systems are also installed almost across the board to help prevent the loss of control that can lead to a rollover.

Over the past decade, stability control systems have already proven themselves by reducing the rate of crashes in the models in which they're installed. Stability control systems can reduce the risk of a single-vehicle crash by more than 50 percent. A study by the NHTSA shows an average 35 percent reduction in single-vehicle crashes for passenger cars and a 67 percent reduction for SUVs equipped with stability control.

**Know Your SCORE**

Frustrated after finding out that none of the established crash-ratings systems corresponded consistently to actual injury or fatality risk, retired mechanical engineer Michael Dulberger started the nonprofit group Informed For Life about five years ago. Motivated to devise a system that would better correlate with fatality rates, Dulberger developed the SCORE (Statistical Combination Of Risk Elements) as a better way of combining all the available safety data to assess the relative risk of each model.

For the SCORE, crash ratings are weighted according to national accident fatality statistics, in which 43 percent of deaths occur in front impacts, 28 percent in rollovers, 26 percent in side impacts and 3 percent in rear impacts. Other factors known to affect vehicle fatality statistics, like vehicle weight and whether the vehicle is equipped with stability control, are factored into the formula.

When checking the SCORE versus real fatality data, it far more closely matches the fatality rate on a model-by-model basis than either IIHS or NHTSA ratings alone, showing its merit in quickly summarizing the relative risk of a particular model.

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