

# Road safety - A mindset that really counts

**By** Mohit Arora, Executive Director, J D Power Asia Pacific

In the ongoing discourse on road safety in India, what has been critically missing is the Voice of the Customer. It is with this perspective that this article sets out to fill in the gap of this discussion by bringing forth what Indian customers want with respect to safety features in their cars and to shed light on their attitudes towards vehicle and road safety.

**Finding 1:** Consumer's demands for active safety features in their cars have gone up significantly over the past 5 years indicating increasing acceptance of these safety technologies. For example, in 2014, more than 80% of car owners have said that they want Anti-Lock Braking Systems (ABS) in their cars, more than three-quarters of them want passenger seat airbags and just under 75% of car owners want stability or traction control. These are significantly high figures from just a few years ago.

**Finding 2:** Consumers are reporting increased satisfaction with visibility and driving safety in their cars. In our JD Power's 2014 India Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout (APEAL) Study, visibility and driving safety are the most influential performance categories on new-vehicle customer satisfaction in the small car market, contributing 16% to the overall APEAL score, and is the third-most impactful category in the midsize segment, where it contributes 13% to overall satisfaction. This reflects that automakers have largely kept pace with customer's expectations and demands for visibility and safety.

**Finding 3:** While customers are willing

to pay more today for his new car, our 2014 India Escaped Shopper Study, reflects that the car buyer is still sensitive to the overall price of the car where the top most cited reason for rejection is cost. Cognizant of this knowledge, automakers are sensitive

to add advanced safety features that will price the customers out of their budgets. This financial reluctance does not way out to bridge the gap between customers' demands and fitment rates of active safety features and the same is featured below for ready reference.

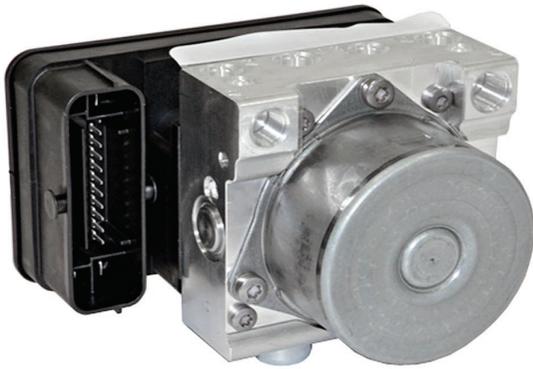
Safety Feature	Demand - percentage of all car owners that "want" this feature	Current Installation Rates - Percentage of all car owners that "have" this feature installed at delivery
Anti-lock braking system	81%	36%
Airbags	76%	21%
Stability/ Traction Control	73%	4%

Source: J.D. Power's 2014 India Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout (APEAL) Study

However, with global platforms producing key safety technologies, economies of scale will reduce these costs and in-turn the price burden will

alleviate in customer's pavilion and customers will get cost advantage keeping in mind the rationality of the same.





▲ Anit-lock Braking System

Clearly, customer awareness and acceptance of active safety technologies are moving in the right direction. When we understand this against the backdrop of a concerted push by the government, automakers, dealers, international organisations and even media influencers all pledging their support to make roads safer in India, it begs a befuddling question – why are road accident statistics still increasing every year? And would the trend of road-related fatalities decline in the future if we continue on this path?

## Paradigm shift in mindset on safety required

As the number of car sales is expected to reach 6.31 million units in 2022 from the current 2.86 million units (Source: LMC Automotive), it is beginning to worry observers and policymakers that this would lead to a corresponding rise in traffic fatalities. However, if we look elsewhere at a country with the safest roads in the world, it is found that Sweden had managed to bring down the number of traffic deaths to a record low (3 per 100,000 inhabitants) despite vehicle sales doubling in the same time period. This has been largely achieved with all stakeholders sharing the same intolerance for fatalities and injuries on the roads and that mindset has permeated every aspect of traffic road safety from driver discipline, pedestrian awareness, strict policing, urban planning and implementation of hefty penalties for people who flout traffic laws.

➔ Mohit Arora, Executive Director, J D Power Asia Pacific

If we look somewhere nearer, Singapore's road fatality rate is at 5.1 per 100,000 inhabitants (India is more than three times higher) and this figure has been consistently on the decline since 2010. Like Sweden, this nation-state has very low tolerance for road accidents and deaths and a drive down the expressways will show for it. Advanced digital speed enforcement cameras are installed at regular intervals of the expressway forcing drivers to abide by the speed limits. Drivers who drink and drive are issued stiff fines, demerit points and jail sentences are meted out for hit and run drivers. Jaywalking is considered as a criminal offence.

Beyond these legislations, the mindset of road safety is inculcated in all citizens at school-going age where it is mandatory for all upper primary school students to undergo road safety education at a national road safety park. There is also "social policing" where an increasing number of car drivers are installing video cameras in their cars and have no qualms of uploading videos of rogue drivers to publicly shame them on social media platforms.

What this underscores is the Singapore society's attitude towards road accidents – that it is rare, tragic and



unacceptable. When that is combined with physical infrastructure and cars that are designed for road safety, you have the potent and winning combination of mobility with safety.

## Hardware is ready but what about the heart-ware?

In India, the general public's attitudes towards road safety are quite different. Like many countries, India is not without its traffic laws but strict and consistent implementation across the unwieldy nation is often patchy. While car owners are aware and demand safety technologies, only the features highlighted can keep the roads safe if there is no driver discipline and public awareness. Take the example of safety belts where it has become a standard fitment in all cars in India – not only is India a latecomer in enforcing this law which promulgates the mandatory wearing of seatbelt, the driver sensitivity on the importance of wearing a seatbelt is still very low.

In India, there are encouraging efforts by various stakeholders to drive road safety efforts. Several automakers have made road safety their CSR's main priority and some have gone on to champion awareness campaigns to get drivers to support a new culture of road safety. Major media organisations are also urging people to pledge not to drink and drive. These are all initiatives to be encouraged and lauded.

However, as infrastructure becomes better in India and speeds of cars increase, the undesirable trend of road accidents will only go up until and unless there is a strong ecosystem where the government, automakers, drivers, pedestrians and the aam aadmi come together to work towards the common goal of making India's roads safer and not just pay lip service to achieving Vision Zero mission of no fatalities or serious injuries in road traffic. **ACI**