

Automobile Safety in Pakistan

Safe vehicles and road safety is still considered as an alien concept in Pakistan. There is a general state of apathy at all levels towards safe vehicles despite the fact that it affects every one of us. Improving vehicle safety is a key strategy used in addressing international and national road casualty reduction targets and in achieving a safer road traffic system. Vehicle safety addresses the safety of all road users and comprises measures to help avoid a crash (crash avoidance) or reduce injury in the event of a crash (crash protection). Substantial and evidence-based improvements have been made in the last 15 years around the world and research has identified large scope for enhancing vehicle safety further.

It is envisaged that, improvements to vehicle safety results from Vehicle safety policy, legislation, consumer information and initiatives of individual manufacturers. Policy declaration set forth government's intention to protect the consumers and increasingly promote safety as a marketable commodity, the legislations aims for setting a minimum but high level of protection across the product line; consumer information aims to encourage the highest possible levels of safety. Countries active on safety issues engage in international legislative development work; carry out national research and monitoring of vehicle safety; ensure that laws are properly enforced and encourage local car industry to fast track key safety measures.

In Pakistan, more than 13,000 innocent road users are getting killed every year and more than 50,000 are severely injured and become disabled. An estimated cost of all this unnecessary loss and burden on the national exchequer is more than Rs. 100 Billion every year¹.

Policy Deficit on Auto Safety in Pakistan:

Pakistan presents a dismal picture as far as auto safety is concerned. We not only lack policy declaration from the incumbent government, our legislations are old and further down, the implementation of the existing mechanisms are completely absent and dysfunctional. It is also astonishing to learn that our Legislature's response and stance towards vehicle safety related problems and issues are literally nonexistent. Much talked about and long awaited Pakistan Auto Policy was supposed to be declared in 2014 but despite the fact that more than a year has passed it has not seen the light of day and has been delayed for one or the other reason not known to the consumers.

Legislation on Vehicle Safety:

It is evident from the review of some legislations that these are not only outdated but also have not been amended since 1969. A brief account of these is as under:

- Section 39 of the Motor Vehicles Ordinance (MVO) 1965
- Section 35 of The Motor Vehicle Rules (MVR) 1969 that deals with the issue and renewal of certificate of fitness of vehicles
- Chapter 6 of MVR 1969 deals with details of body construction, essential equipment and requirements for the maintenance of a motor vehicle².

The emphases of all these provisions are more centric towards the management aspects of the vehicles and without any specification of standards, testing procedures³ and overall safety standards of the vehicles. These laws have failed to bring changes on ground as they have not been implemented efficiently and equitably by the institutions made responsible for that.

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Vehicle safety Standards:

The Year 2000 saw a significant change while the incumbent government established Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA). The main focus of the PSQCA among others was development of Metallurgy, Standards, Testing and Quality infrastructure in Pakistan. However, over the years this resource starved organization has failed to develop any safety standards for vehicles and could only developed standards for 2 wheelers⁴. Similarly, Engineering Development Board (EDB) has been mandated to strengthening the Engineering sector so far has not played its role as ensure safety standards in automobiles in Pakistan. Failure of these national institutions to develop safety standards proved to be catastrophic for consumers as they are being denied internationally accepted minimum safety features like Airbags and Antilock Breaking System (ABS) in majority of variants currently offered in the market.

Table- A below shows safety and quality features offered by three automobile giants in Pakistan; Suzuki, Honda, and Toyota in various models.

Table - A: Safety features offered in Pakistan for Suzuki, Honda and Toyota models

Car Type	Safety features		
	ABS	Airbag	Emission standard
Mehran	X	X	✓
Swift	✓	X	✓
Cultus	X	X	✓
Civic VTI Oriol	✓	✓	✓
Civic VTI I-VTEC	✓	✓	✓
City	✓	X	✓
XLI	X	X	✓
GLI	✓	X	✓
Altis/Grande	✓	✓	✓

Source: Suzuki, Honda, Toyota - Pakistan Websites

Safety features such as ABS is absent in all models of Suzuki except for Swift, whereas all models of Honda have this feature and Toyota lacks ABS in its Corolla XLI. Airbags, another important feature required for safety purposes is absent in all models of Suzuki, whereas Toyota does not offer airbags for its XLI and GLI models. It is pertinent to mention here that ABS systems are required on all new passenger cars sold in the EU since 2007, whereas all across the world, vehicle safety ratings encourage manufacturers to take a comprehensive approach to occupant safety and a good rating can only be achieved by combining airbags with other safety features. **Thus, almost all new globally manufactured cars come with at least two airbags as standard.**

Pakistan automobile industry is inward looking and it tries to protect itself through the use of available regulatory instruments. Statistics show that local auto manufacturing industry is consistently making profits year after year. However, from the safety perspective nothing significantly has changed till now and consumers despite the fact that they are paying the premium price for the vehicles are denied the level of safety which is expected from the manufacturers.

The era of modern safety standards began in 1958, when the United Nations established a World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations. An agency of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), this body created a set of international standards for vehicle safety. In general, these codes cover lighting, instrumentation, braking,

Indus Motors Company (IMC) reported a profit after tax of Rs. 3.87 billion in 2013-14. The sales revenue was Rs 57 billion. During the same period Pak Suzuki Motors (PSMC) declared revenues increase to Rs29.1billion. Similarly Honda Atlas Cars (HAC) posted gross margin of impressive 12.7 per cent for the same time period.

restraint systems, and the car's capacity to protect its occupants. Many nations now adhere to these codes, including the European countries, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and in recent years India has also joined the league. Pakistan is virtually nonexistent in these international regulatory regimes.

It is imperative to benchmark the performance of the Pakistan domestic automobile industry against the world practices by comparing globally accepted standards and regulations governing the production of quality products, adopted by neighboring country in the region. Unlike Pakistan, India has stronger Regulatory regime in place which is working efficiently.

Regional Experience:

As safety requirements are critical issues facing the automotive industry, worldwide and as a part of the endeavor to ensure Indian cars match global safety standards, the Government of India has formed a panel which is working on introducing certain safety features in new cars in India. Indian Automobile Industry in the last decade has made significant progress and is progressively aligning technically with international safety standards.

India has currently more than 70 percent safety regulations which partially or fully equivalent technically with Global Technical Regulations (GTR) and UN Regulations while retaining the Indian driving and environmental conditions. Regulations are reviewed periodically by Automotive Industry Standards Committee (AISC) and recommended to the Technical standing Committee on Central Motor Vehicles Rules – Technical Standing Committee (CMVR-TSC) for adoption and notification by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways Department (MoRT&H) under the CMVR.

Alignment of Indian regulation such as Automotive Industry Standards and Bureau of Indian Standards (AIS/ BIS) with GTR's / ECE is being attempted as per the broad roadmap drafted by Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM). In order to have a planned approach to introduction of advanced safety features, (SIAM) drew up a Road Map for Automobile Safety Standards. The Roadmap was prepared by the CMVR, Safety & Regulations Committee. Establishment of Bharat New Vehicle Safety Assessment Program (BNVSAP) was one of the steps towards achieving the international safety standards. Under this program certain mile stones have been marked. Table B shows the minimum safety features which would be achieved under the program.

Table - B: Minimum Safety Standards under (BNVSAP)

Air Bags
Anti Lock Braking System (ABS)
Electronic Brake Distribution (EBD)
Electronic Stability Control (ESC)
Seat Belts Reminder
Child Lock

One must ask this question that what is it with us Pakistanis' that, makes us different from rest of the world? Why can't we get essential safety features as others are getting? Aren't we paying the same money? The answer is that; it's 21st century and the automotive world is soaked into technology, every auto-related firm is offering newer and better safety system in its cars but in our country consumers are stranded with no choice and could only compromise with whatever is available because we do not have legal regime to enforce and back the consumers. Consumers in Pakistan don't get all the features even with the top-variants for which they pay similar amount as in other countries. In absence of comprehensive and effective regulation, the domestic automobile manufacturers in the most blatant manner do not offer even minimum safety features such as Anti-lock Breaking System (ABS), airbags, emission standards in all their vehicles.

Predominantly there seem two reasons for that: a) The price factor since adding these options will add into the cost and more importantly, b) The lack of a consumer protection agency like National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in USA or Ministry of Road Transport & Highways Department (MoRT&H) in India which are mandated to continually test vehicles for safety and road worthiness. Moreover, NHTSA type agencies are the authorities who push safety standards and make them mandatory to be available in all cars, and this is just one of the few of their responsibilities.

Recommendations:

Keeping the above discussion in perspective, it is apparent that in Pakistan there exists a complete lack of seriousness at all tiers of administrative as well as regulatory framework as far as automobile safety is concerned, thus, creating a vacuum which can only be filled by introducing a major regime change for protecting consumers. Moreover, lack of standard safety and quality features in locally manufactured vehicles is making the consumers suffer. In the current scenario, it is imperative that following steps should be taken:

1. Make availability of Airbag and ABS in all variants as mandatory upon manufacturers with immediate effect and ensure minimum safety to the consumers.
2. At Policy level, incumbent government must finalize the long awaited Auto Policy in which following areas must be looked into:
 - a. Ensuring consumer interests are looked after
 - b. Putting in Place Pakistan Automobile Manufacturing Standards
 - c. Putting in Place Pakistan Auto Safety standards and ensure implementations
2. At legislative level out dated laws should either be amended or repealed and new laws which are coherent with the international standards should be introduced.
3. At implementation level PSQCA must build up its capacity of inspection, audit and testing system and establishes links with international agencies to get accreditation of labs and standards. Similarly, clear functions of EDB (Engineering Development Board) must be elaborated.

In order to achieve these goals, the government should announce clear time lines for the implementation of standard safety and emission policies and at the same time the automobile manufacturers should voluntarily comply with international safety and quality standards that would ultimately make them globally more competitive and offer Pakistani consumers good value for money.

References

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