

Chery a 'life-and-death choice'

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Zero. That's the safety rating the Chinese made Chery QQ3 scored in the first independent crash-test assessment of some of the most popular compact cars in the country.



Photo: cars.co.za

The London-based Global NCAP (New Car Assessment Programme) and South Africa's Automobile Association jointly released the star ratings of five small cars, which between them account for about 65% of all new cars sold in 2016: the QQ3, Datsun Go+, Renault Sandero, Polo Vivo and Toyota Etios - the last two being the country's top-selling vehicles.

The top performer and the second bestselling car last month was the Etios, scoring four stars for adult safety and three for child safety in the back seat.

"This is a life-and-death choice," said David Ward, secretary-general of Global NCAP.

"It is good to see a four-star result in these first African crash-test ratings, but it's extremely disappointing that there's a zero-star car."

South Africa has one of the highest car accident fatality rates in the world - 14071 people were killed on our roads last year.

Ward described the QQ3 as "sub-standard and unsafe", in stark contrast to how Chery SA, a division of McCarthy Limited, describes itself on its website: "Chery prides itself on manufacturing robust, reliable vehicles to ensure that you're safe for the whole journey."

"Such a poor result shows why it is so important for countries like South Africa to fully apply the UN's crash-test standards," Ward said. "A car like the QQ3 simply shouldn't be on sale anywhere in the world."

All five cars, base models in each case, had crash-test dummies strapped into them, representing two adults in the front and two small children in the back, before being driven at 64km/h into a barrier simulating a car of similar size and weight.

The Renault Sandero was rated three stars for adult safety and four for children, making it the safest for children of the five cars.

Sales figures from industry body Naamsa show Toyota sold 2059 Etios models last month - double the number sold in September - and Renault sold 442 Sanderos.

The Polo Vivo - still the country's top seller, with sales of 2851 last month - scored three stars for both adult and child safety, ahead of the Datsun GO, which got a one-star rating for adult protection and two stars for children.

Both the Chery and the Datsun were found to have unstable body shells.

Global NCAP raised the alarm about the Datsun GO's body shell three years ago.

"The vehicle structure collapsed during the [crash] test and the high forces placed on the dummies pose a grave risk of death or serious injury," it said at the time, urging Nissan (which owns the Datsun brand) to withdraw the GO from sale in South Africa.

It was not, and more than 700 GOs are sold in SA every month, many of them to car rental companies.

Lack of child protection in the back seats is a concern to Global NCAP. Some of the child seats recommended by manufacturers were found to be incompatible with their vehicle's belt system.

In the Polo Vivo, Chery QQ3 and Datsun GO there is no three-point seatbelt on the middle seat in the back. Assessors said there was no way to safely install a child seat or transport a small child safely in that seat.

Source: *The Times*

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