

AIT & FIA Motoring and Touring Organisations target a better Europe for mobile consumers

The AIT & FIA, who represent national motoring and touring organisations worldwide and more than 43 million citizens in Europe are targeting their resources at making Europe better for mobile consumers. EuroTest - a pan European programme and consortium of motoring and touring organisations has been an important tool for putting the quality and safety of Europe's mobility related infrastructure to the test since 2000. Co-ordinated by AIT & FIA Brussels, 15 partner clubs from 13 EU member States and one potential future Member State (Croatia) are using their commitment to consumer protection to call for a Europe where mobile consumers can circulate using quality infrastructure and in safety.

Defending the mobile consumer is the EuroTest programme's core objective. It ensures through independent testing that Europe's mobility related infrastructure meets the standards of quality and safety that AIT & FIA partners believe mobile consumers deserve. In this way we hope to facilitate the free movement of consumers in Europe and in particular for tourism purposes.

In the past we have examined Europe's motorway service areas, ro ro passenger ferries, major road tunnels, the quality and safety of inter urban high ways and railway stations. But improving the quality of mobility is a never ending task. For this reason we are turning our attention to new areas such as sign posting, major road works on main highways in peak holiday seasons and basic and practical knowledge of drivers about their cars. Alert motorists, who know their route, are aware of what steps to take in the event of an incident on the road or in a road tunnel are most likely to arrive safely at their destination. Most mobile consumers use a range of transport modes, the car should not always be the first choice. Again the quality and safety of the services offered are paramount for consumers continued selection of these alternatives.

The test methodologies used draw on the best available experience and regulation. All surveys use a common rating scheme and each test is repeated at regular intervals to check for enhancements.

Improvements have been achieved for the consumer thanks to immediate widespread publication of test results good and bad in the national and international media. National media publicity has been reinforced by clubs' demands for improvements addressed to the responsible administrative and legislative authorities. In 2004, news of our Motorways Service Areas survey was seen on television by over 70 million European viewers and circulated in 58 million newspaper copies. At least 35 million viewers saw news of our ferry test this year also. EuroTest is of great interest to mobile consumers.

Key EuroTest objectives include:

- ◆ To raise public awareness about the quality and safety of Europe's mobility as it actually is
- ◆ To call for improve quality and safety standards
- ◆ To provide mobile consumers with tips and recommendations so that they can safeguard their own mobility
- ◆ To stimulate public debate about our EuroTest findings, if necessary call for legislation and encourage operators to raise the quality and standards of their offer.

Acting independently, the EuroTest partners have established a unique position in the field of consumer protection for mobile consumers. Our prime concern is to assure quality, safety and mobility for our members and all mobile European citizens. "Making the difference" is what we look to achieve through this testing programme.

Over the last 6 years, at the local, national and international level in both the public and private sectors this is what we have achieved.

With EU support the Clubs' yield greater value added for mobile consumers

Our ferry test findings helped to shape EU ro ro passenger ferry legislation: directives 98/18/EC and 99/35/EC. Our MSA test has shown consumers the difference in quality of services available on Europe's highways. UK citizens have suffered the poorest quality MSAs for long enough and now as a result of EuroTest, the UK Government with the help of our partner the AA motoring Trust are going to do something about it. In Belgium, the government has already stepped in to organise national quality surveys of Belgium's motorway service areas.

Our tunnel tests have made tunnel accidents involving deaths and serious injuries unacceptable in public opinion. Regular annual inspections of major tunnels across Europe have achieved numerous impacts:

- ◆ Operators have reacted by initiating major improvements of their tunnels,
- ◆ National and local authorities have taken decisions to invest heavily in refurbishment programmes e.g. Austria adopted a 10 year programme in 2003 to add a second tube to all major tunnels
- ◆ In the UK, millions of pounds will be spent refurbishing the Mersey Tunnel.

EuroRAP (the European Road Assessment Programme) is making it clear that road infrastructure has a major role to play in the outcome of traffic accidents once they occur. Road authorities like vehicle manufacturers and drivers have a serious role to play in the prevention of deaths and serious injuries on Europe's roads. With a dual assessment methodology (a road protection score and risk mapping) EuroRAP gives tested roads a star rating depending of the level of protection found from major death causing situations. At the same time EuroRAP provides drivers and road authorities with data about the rates of death and serious injuries that occur on inter-urban roads in a given area, region or country. The risk rate (accidents per vehicle kilometre) indicates the risk to the road user; the risk density informs authorities of the number of accidents that occur per kilometre on the road in question. EuroRAP takes this data, provides comparisons with other similar roads and offers recommendations on the potential for accident reduction.

The Future

EuroTest is consumer protection by motoring and touring organisations at its best. Bringing together as it does partners from both old and new European member states it is not only calling better quality and safety but demonstrating that these objectives are achievable by identifying the best and worst examples.

EuroTest will continue to play an important role in monitoring Europe's mobility infrastructure to the benefit of consumers, legislators and operators alike. All should share in the common goal of promoting free movement of European citizens in safety and in quality