

WATCH | Driving a death trap? These are some of SA's unsafest cars

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

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

The top performer, and the second best-selling car in the country 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 ever 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 – 14,071 people were killed on our roads last year.

Yet according to a recent news24.com survey, when asked whether crash test results would affect their next car purchase decision, 48% of respondents said price was more important than safety.



The Chery QQ3 during the crash test.

Image: Global NCAAP

Ward described the QQ3 as “sub-standard and unsafe”, in stark contrast to how Chery South Africa, a division of McCarthy Limited, describes it 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 – which currently isn’t happening,” Ward said. “A car like the QQ3 simply shouldn’t be on sale anywhere in the world.

“When a country has very low regulated safety standards, there’s an incentive for motor manufacturers to undercut their competitors on price (by sacrificing safety),” he said.

“Consumers need clear, comparative crash test information to help inform their car purchase decisions.

“This is why Global NCAP supports the introduction of mandatory crash test labelling for all new cars sold in South Africa.”

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RESULTS 2017			
 Toyota ETIOS	✓2		
 Renault SANDERO	✓2		
 Volkswagen POLO VIVO	✓2		
 Datsun GO+	✓1		
 Chery QQ3	X		



Image: Global NCAAP

It's a move supported by the Automobile Association (AA).

"The crash tests represent an important step in road safety in South Africa," said AA CEO Collins Khumalo.

"We believe consumers have a right to know what the safety ratings are on the cars they want to buy and we don't believe this should be too much of a challenge to make happen."

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/hr into a barrier simulating a car of similar size and weight.



The Renault Sandero during the crash test.

Image: Global NCAAP

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 reveal that Toyota sold 2,059 Etios models last month – double the number sold September – and Renault sold 442 Sanderos.



Volkswagen Polo VIVO during the crash test.

Image: Global NCAAP

The Polo Vivo – still the country’s top seller, with sales of 2,851 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 that of children in the back.

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, around the time the vehicle went on sale in South Africa.

“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,” the body said at the time, urging Nissan (which owns the Datsun brand) to withdraw the GO from sale in South Africa and other markets.

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



The Datsun GO+ during the crash test.

Image: Global NCAAP

Datsun maintains that the car “brings independence from public transport to many and provides them with the personal mobility that has enabled them to find and access new opportunities within the economy”.

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, and the assessors said there was no way to safely install a child seat or transport a small child safely in that seat.



The Toyota Etios during the crash test.

Image: Global NCAAP

Only the Toyota Etios and Renault Sandero offer Standard ISOFIX anchorages and a three-point seatbelt for all passengers, essential for fitting a child seat.

And only the Sandero allows for the front passenger airbag to be deactivated, should a small child be strapped in there.