

PRESS RELEASE

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Europe's roads are still over cluttered with road signs: causing confusion among drivers

EuroTest's latest survey reveals that 61% of the drivers surveyed consider the presence of too many signs as well as misplaced signs to be the main reasons why European drivers get lost when driving in unknown environments and areas.

The different phases of the road signs survey, in which 16000 drivers took part, were conducted during June and July 2008 with the aim of finding out how satisfied drivers are with directional signing in Europe and what requirements signposts should meet. Telephone interviews and internet based questionnaires were used to gather drivers' views for this EuroTest. Telephone interviewees were asked to give answers in response to a range of described scenarios. Respondents to the online survey commented on various topics aided by the provision of photos and pictograms. Interviews were conducted in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. ADAC and RACC, the German and Catalan motoring clubs developed the methodology with the support of the EuroTest partners.

On this occasion, as in a previous survey in 2005, EuroTest also asked drivers to choose Europe's most "stupid" sign from a selection of 10 proposals. This year's award goes to a signpost spotted in Piemont Cuneo-Asti, Italy which was so extremely faded that hardly anything apart from the blue background and an orange/red object resembling a full moon were visible. It left our respondents stupefied!! Second and third places went to directional signs spotted in Austria and the UK. Their contradictory messages brought drivers to a halt!

Drivers were clear in their views about the causes of confusion and distraction: billboards compete with the road signs for drivers' attention; road signs on the European road network display too much information thus overloading drivers when they have very little time to make driving decisions. Interestingly though, the survey also reveals that drivers using navigation systems when in doubt trust the actual signposting more than their systems. On whole, drivers still more confused as opposed to being well guided by road signing in Europe which poses a potentially very serious detriment to road safety levels.

The problem of road signs clutter is not improving, if anything the situation is getting worse! The authorities are finding new reasons to put up evermore road signs! A growing number of European cities are establishing low emission zones which obviously require new signs – all of them different from country to country across Europe, in countries like Italy even from zone to zone. Either high emission vehicles are banned from these zones or vehicle access is restricted. EU law obliges all Member States to improve air quality in areas where it is highly polluted. One answer has been the creation of low emission zones. While the EU Directive dictates the limits for certain pollutants and how often per year the emission levels may exceed these limits, it is left to each EU country to ensure that the targets are met. The resulting additional clutter of road signs comes from the variety of approaches and indeed an equal variety of road signs very often only known or understood by local inhabitants. An average of 32% of drivers surveyed did not recognise signs depicting low emission zones or environmental traffic restrictions.

Caroline Ofoegbu, deputy Director General of the FIA European Bureau said: “EuroTest’s 2005 findings on road signs revealed 91% of European drivers would like to see a harmonisation of traffic signs in Europe. This year’s survey further underlines the need to tackle this issue. Despite the widespread application of the 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Signs across Europe, this legislation is lagging behind the drivers needs. With an ever changing picture, a common understanding of signposting is needed respecting the Vienna Convention. At present, signs not in the Convention are used unilaterally by some countries and in other cases the same sign may have different meanings.”

For more information about the EuroTest survey on Road Signs visit www.eurotestmobility.com

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Notes to editors

1. Through EuroTest, 18 automobile clubs in 17 countries, members of the FIA, have been putting the quality and safety of mobility in Europe to the test since 2000 for the benefit of their members and all mobile consumers in Europe. The EuroTest partners have constantly called for a Europe where the mobile consumer can circulate freely using quality infrastructure and in safety.
2. EuroTest has also led a Road Signs Survey in 2005, the results can be found here: <http://eurotestmobility.com/eurotest.php?itemno=60>

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