



For Immediate Release

HONDA COMMERCIAL CONFUSES ISSUE OF SMALL CAR SAFETY

- Government agencies review Honda Fit commercial**
- Five-star crash ratings only count inside narrow weight class**
- Car companies work to keep crash safety truth quiet**
- "Old Husbands' Tales" put women at risk**
- Fit made to look like a "blow fish in armor"**

Two years ago Honda North America was forced to change the content of a TV commercial for its CR-V sport-ute because it contained "inaccurate representations" about the compact SUV's crash safety ability.

Now the North American branch of the Japanese company is running another commercial for an even smaller vehicle, the Fit subcompact car, that also suggests that the vehicle's size doesn't affect its crash safety ability.

As a result, the author who raised the issue with CR-V commercial in 2007 is filing complaints with government agencies and regulatory bodies in Canada and the U.S. about the Fit commercial.

"We wrote Car Advice For Women (and Smart Men) because there are a lot of auto-related issues involving safety and money that many women don't understand," says Alex Law, "and the most important safety item involves the hard truth that vehicle size is very important in a frontal crash. I wish it weren't so, with so many people looking to smaller cars to save gas, but it is. People need to know that when they're deciding on what kind of car to buy."

Law says "The Honda commercial is an example of an effort by the car companies to let the public believe that a five-star frontal crash rating means the same level of safety across all car sizes."

Law points out that "government agencies in the U.S., Europe and Australia make it clear that the crash ratings only apply to other vehicles within the same weight class." One of the primary crash-testing agencies, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, plainly says (in capital letters) on its website: "If safety is one of your major considerations PASS UP VERY SMALL, LIGHT VEHICLES."

The car companies all know this, Law says, "But none of them talk about it or complain about competitive advertising because they all have small cars to sell and they'd rather keep this topic away from the public's attention."

Law believes this is a particular issue for women because "They tend to buy smaller cars than men do and, for the most part, they are generally less interested and perhaps less informed about auto-related subjects than men."

Having little interest in cars is understandable, Law says, "But it can put women at risk fiscally as well as physically, which is why we wrote Car Advice For Women and started www.CarNewsForWomen.com, to keep them informed on key auto-related issues."

Law says women have the wrong idea about many auto-related subjects (the book calls them "old-husbands' tales") that involve safety, but in his view "the misunderstanding about five-star crash ratings is the most dangerous."

When it's asked about small car safety, says Law, "The auto industry points out that their vehicles meet all government regulations and that small cars are safer than ever. This is true and it's a good thing, but those improvements can't make up for all of the natural advantage of greater weight."

Many people say that large vehicles are more dangerous because they tend to roll over more easily, but Law points out that a lot of those injuries occur because the people weren't wearing seatbelts. Also, "many of the vehicles inclined to flip have been given stability control systems, which greatly mitigate against the loss of control that causes rollovers."

In April, 2007, Advertising Standards Canada decided that the CR-V commercial "contained inaccurate representations, contrary to Clause 1(a) of the Code. The principal elements that led Council to its decision were the visual images of the downsized industrial vehicles and the advertiser's closing statement: 'Imagine a world where size has nothing to do with safety'."

The original commercial seemed to connect with buyers, Law notes, since sales of the CR-V nearly doubled from the year before.

Law believes that similar impressions are given by the commercial for the Honda Fit. Most of the other animated vehicles in the commercial are smaller than the Fit, which at 2,500 lbs is actually one of the smallest vehicles on the road today.

The most glaring example of that in the commercial is a tanker truck, which can weigh 80,000 lbs but is shown to be much smaller than it really is. All of the other cars on the road are about the same size as the Fit and generally unrecognizable. The only exception is a 1959 Chevrolet El Camino, which is essentially a large car with a pickup bed.

The El Camino's reckless drive through the streets causes all the other vehicles to run for cover, but the Fit suddenly expands to about three times its size and sprouts spikes. It looks like "a blow fish in armor," says Law, and that causes the El Camino to lose its oil and cower away.

The next thing the consumer sees are the words "Fierce Defender."

In Law's opinion, "the message that the Honda Fit commercial means to impart is quite clear, and misleading as a result. Even if Honda changes or withdraws the commercial now, the wrong impression has been made on millions of people."

Crash Testing Experts On The Importance Of Vehicle Weight

NHTSA (U.S)

"All other things being equal, a heavier vehicle will generally better protect you in a crash. This is particularly the case in two-vehicle crashes. NHTSA research historically has shown that occupants in passenger cars are at a greater risk of being fatally injured when struck in the front or the side by a heavier and higher-riding light truck such as a pickup or SUV."

NCAP (EUROPE)

"In frontal impacts between cars, the occupants of the heavier car or the one with higher structures tend to fare better than those traveling in lighter, lower cars. As these effects are currently impossible to overcome, Euro NCAP only makes comparisons within size categories. The rating of a car within its size category is a function of the quality of its safety design."

INSURANCE INSTITUTE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY (U.S.)

"The first crashworthiness attributes to consider are vehicle size and weight. Small, light vehicles generally offer less protection than larger, heavier ones.. There's less structure to absorb crash energy, so deaths and injuries are more likely to occur in both single- and multiple-vehicle crashes. So if safety is one of your major considerations PASS UP VERY SMALL, LIGHT VEHICLES." (NB: the IIHS used the caps)

ANCAP (Australia)

"ANCAP results can be used to compare the protection offered to occupants in the event of a severe frontal offset or side impact crash for vehicles of similar size and weight. Care must be taken when comparing results for different vehicles as only those vehicles of similar mass can be correctly compared. As a heavier vehicle will generally provide better protection in a collision with a smaller and lighter car, any result comparison should be restricted to cars of a similar class."

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For more information, contact Alexander Law at 416-981-3404 for voicemail or email AlexCAMS@aol.com. Alex has been an automotive journalist for 30 years, contributing to magazines, newspapers, websites, and TV and radio shows in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. He is also the author of a novel (To An Easy Grave; St. Martin's Press) and co-author of Car Advice For Women (and Smart Men), from CAMS Publishing.

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