

AUTO BUZZ

Bumper rules to be aligned with U.S. and Europe

MICHAEL BETTENCOURT
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Transport Canada has revealed that it is close to aligning its bumper standards not only with those in the United States, but with European regulations as well.

The move would reduce the cost of selling vehicles in Canada for all brands, which could potentially also help align Canadian and American prices. Canada's unique bumpers were found to increase prices and reduce fuel economy in a study by the U.S. government's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and was always one of the first issues to be raised by auto manufacturers when asked about the continuing difference between American and Canadian list prices.

The announcement also puts the pressure on auto makers to address the pricing issue by making it easier to buy cars south of the border, which can offer savings upwards of 30 per cent or more on some high-end models.

"The fewer the barriers you have in cross-border movement of vehicles, the greater the pressure will be to ensure that product offerings in Canada are competitive," said David Adams, president of AIAMC, the trade group that represents most non-North American-based auto makers in Canada.

Removing the last major non-tariff government barrier to importing a vehicle from the United States would mark a long-sought-after milestone for the Canadian auto industry, although some studies suggest that long-term repair costs are greater with the American four km/h standard than Canada's current eight km/h requirement for no surface or structural damage.

"This proposed amendment would offer more choice to Canadians who wish to import vehicles," said Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. "At the same time, it would help to maintain the safety of Canadian roads."

The alignment would also remove the most significant regulatory barrier to low volume but often desirable production vehicles, such as previous generations of the Mitsubishi Evolution (the all-new '08 Evo is trickling into Canada now, with a full launch planned for June) as well as the Bugatti Veyron and the Alfa Romeo brand, which is just setting up operations in the United States, but not in Canada.

Less expensive vehicles that can't be imported from the U.S. due to the current bumper rules include the Nissan Altima SE-R and Sentra SE-R, plus Volkswagen's GTI and Jetta GLI models.

Auto makers are ecstatic about the change, and since the Canadian government backed down on requiring separate theft immobilizers on Canadian vehicles late last year, the bumpers were the final non-tariff barrier to importing cars to Canada.

"The proposed regulatory convergence on bumpers is welcomed and has long been an outstanding issue for the industry with respect offering the same vehicle in both Canada and the United States," said Adams. "The proposed rules largely eliminate any difference."

Final input on the proposed changes will be received until April 22, with final regulations expected to be announced in the summer.

Subaru stops sales of Impreza WRX

Subaru Canada is suspending sales of all new Subaru models that feature the turbocharged, 2.5-litre, four-cylinder engine over a potential quality issue, matching a U.S. move earlier this week.

In Canada, only Impreza WRX sedan and hatchback models are affected, says Subaru Canada PR manager Elaine Griffin.

The sales suspension is expected to last at least a week to identify the "root cause and correction" for an engine knock reported in other markets.

"A notice went out to all Subaru dealers here in Canada [Monday] in the interest of preventing any possibility of failures for our customers," wrote Griffin.

The engine is also available in the Forester XT, as well as in Legacy GT sedans and Outback XT models, but Griffin said none of these models currently on dealer lots are affected by the rare move.

"Initial investigation confirms an internal wear issue on the failed units," said the U.S. directive.

Free DVD available on booster seat safety

The Co-Operators insurance company has released a free booster seat safety DVD, produced in conjunction with the Infant and Toddler Safety Association.

Called Car Seat Safety Check, it provides parents and other child caretakers step-by-step instructions for the often-confusing process for selecting appropriate car seats and installing them correctly.

The DVD is part of the company's Buckle Up Bears child-seat clinics, which can't keep up with demand, the company said. So far, nearly 1,600 seats were inspected and installed in 98 clinics across the country.

To receive a free copy of the DVD, e-mail your name and address to community@cooperators.ca.

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