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Ford launches parental control technologies

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DETROIT -- Ford Motor Co. is giving parents a new tool to keep their teenage drivers safer.

Ford on Monday introduced MyKey, a technology that would allow parents to program a teen's vehicle key to limit speed and audio volume, and even to mute the sound system if the driver's seat belt isn't fastened.

MyKey will debut as a standard feature in the 2010 Ford Focus small car and eventually will be offered in several other Ford, Lincoln and Mercury vehicles.

Ford introduced MyKey at a media safety briefing at its development center in suburban Detroit. It also introduced a radar-based collision warning system that sounds an alarm when a vehicle is closing in too fast on a vehicle in front of it and a crash appears imminent.

In addition, the technology flashes a red light in the windshield head-up display and begins charging, though not engaging, the brakes.

Under the MyKey program, parents would have a so-called administrator key, which would have no restrictions. They could then use the vehicle's information center to program additional keys.

The system's features include:

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While the dealership buy/sell market commenced at a slower pace in the first quarter, and despite some uncertainty surrounding tariffs, strong profit and sales expectations are expected in 2025, fueling another highly active year for transactions. The report also features Kerrigan Advisors' signature Blue Sky Multiples by franchise.

• An "insistent" belt-minder system that cannot be overridden and will sound continuously until the seat belt is fastened.

• If equipped, reverse parking sensors, traction control and forward collision warning systems that cannot be disengaged.

• Top speed limit of 80 mph.

• Speed alert warnings that can sound at 45, 55 or 65 mph.

• Low-fuel warnings that come on earlier than normal.

Ford executives said research shows that teenagers are accustomed to restrictions such as TV v-chips and parental controls on their personal computers.

Sue Cischke, Ford's senior vice president for sustainability, environment and safety engineering, acknowledged that the technology would be more popular with parents than with their teenagers.

But Ford executives said that a study of teens shows they would be more open to such a parental control system if they thought it would give them more frequent access to the family car and possible lower insurance premiums.

PRESS RELEASE: Ford's New MyKey System Helps Teens Drive Safer, Conserve Fuel; Gives Parents Peace of Mind

- MyKey(TM), another innovation from the company that introduced SYNC(R), allows parents to limit speed and audio volume to encourage teens to drive safer and improve fuel efficiency.

- Harris Interactive Survey shows that many parents would allow teens to drive more often if their vehicle was equipped with MyKey - helping young drivers build road safety experience.

- MyKey will debut as a standard feature next year on the 2010 Ford Focus and will quickly be offered on many other Ford, Lincoln and Mercury models.

DEARBORN, Mich., Oct. 6 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Ford Motor Company (NYSE:F) is introducing an innovative new technology -- called MyKey -- designed to help parents encourage their teen-agers to drive safer and more fuel efficiently, and increase safety-belt usage.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20081006/CLM019)

Ford's MyKey feature -- which debuts next year as standard equipment on the 2010 Ford Focus and will quickly become standard on many other Ford, Lincoln and Mercury models -- allows owners to program a key that can limit the vehicle's top speed and audio volume. MyKey also encourages safety-belt usage, provides earlier low-fuel warnings and can be programmed to sound chimes at 45, 55 and 65 miles per hour.

"Ford not only offers industry-leading crash protection and crash avoidance systems, we also are committed to developing new technologies such as MyKey that encourage safer driving behavior," said Susan Cischke, Ford group vice president of Sustainability, Environment and Safety Engineering. "MyKey can help promote safer driving, particularly among teens, by encouraging seat belt use, limiting speed and reducing distractions."

MyKey is appealing to parents of teen drivers, including 75 percent who like the speed-limiting feature, 72 percent who like the more insistent safety-belt reminder, and 63 percent who like the audio limit feature, according to a recent Harris Interactive Survey conducted for Ford.

About 50 percent of those who would consider purchasing MyKey also said they would allow their children to use the family vehicle more often if it were equipped with the new technology. The added seat time can help teens build their driving skills in a more controlled setting, complementing graduated licensing laws that give young drivers more driving freedom as they get older.

More than half of parents surveyed worry that their teen-age children are driving at unsafe speeds, talking on hand-held cell phones or texting while driving, or otherwise driving distracted. More than a third of parents also are concerned that their teens do not always buckle their safety belts when driving.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), teens are more likely to take risks such as speeding -- a contributing factor in 30 percent of all fatal crashes. Teens also are less likely to wear safety belts than older drivers.

Teens surveyed by Harris said they are largely open to MyKey if it means they will have more freedom to drive. Initially, 67 percent of teens polled said they wouldn't want MyKey features. However, if using MyKey would lead to greater driving privileges, only 36 percent would object to the technology.

"We've upgraded an existing, proven technology -- the SecuriLock passive anti-theft system -- with some simple software upgrades to develop a new unique feature that we believe will resonate with customers," said Jim Buczkowski, director, Electrical and Electronic Systems Engineering -- the same team that developed SYNC in partnership with Microsoft. "We also developed MyKey's functions in such a way to quickly spread it across multiple vehicle lines, giving us the ability to go mass market in the spirit of other Ford innovations such as safety belts, stability control and SYNC."

Holding the key

The MyKey system allows the parent to program any key through the vehicle message center, which updates the SecuriLock(TM) passive anti-theft system. When the MyKey is inserted into the ignition, the system reads the transponder chip in the key and immediately identifies the MyKey code, which enables certain default driving modes, including:

-- Persistent Ford Beltminder(TM) with audio mute. Ford's Beltminder system typically provides a six-second reminder chime every minute for five minutes. With MyKey, the Beltminder chime continues at the regular interval and the audio system is muted until the safety belt is buckled. A message center display "Buckle Up to Unmute Radio" also appears on the instrument cluster.

-- Earlier low-fuel warning. Rather than a warning at 50 miles to empty, MyKey provides a warning at 75 miles to empty.

-- If MyKey is in the ignition, features such as Park Aid and BLIS(TM) (Blind Spot Information System) with Cross Traffic Alert cannot be deactivated.

Additional MyKey features that can be programmed through the vehicle's message center setup menu:

-- Limited top speed of 80 mph

-- Traction control system, that limits tire spin, cannot be deactivated

-- Limited audio volume to 44 percent of total volume

-- A speed alert chime at 45, 55 or 65 mph

Using MyKey to teach teens to avoid speeding can provide an added benefit -- improved fuel economy. Ford research shows that driving 55 mph instead of 65 mph consumes 15 percent less fuel, and mastering other eco-driving habits such as avoiding jackrabbit starts and excessive idling can help improve fuel economy by more than 50 percent.

Safety is the key

MyKey is just one way that Ford is helping teens drive more safely. Ford Motor Company Fund's Driving Skills for Life (DSFL) program helps young motorists master four critical driving skills -- hazard recognition, vehicle handling, space management, and speed management -- that help address the majority of dangerous driving conditions. More than 3,000 teens have participated in DSFL

ride-and-drive events. And more than 500,000 people have used the training course since 2003 on www.drivingskillsforlife.com.

About Ford Motor Company

Ford Motor Company, a global automotive industry leader based in Dearborn, Mich., manufactures or distributes automobiles across six continents. With about 229,000 employees and about 90 plants worldwide, the company's core and affiliated automotive brands include Ford, Lincoln, Mercury, Volvo and Mazda. The company provides financial services through Ford Motor Credit Company. For more information regarding Ford's products, please visit www.ford.com

About the Harris Interactive Survey

The survey of 347 parents of teen-age children was conducted online within the U.S. by Harris Interactive from Aug. 1-5. The survey of 249 teen-age drivers was conducted online within the U.S. on behalf of Ford from Sept. 17-22. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

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