



▶ Latest Autos Insider reports

▶ Previous Story ▶ Next Story

SEARCH
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Wednesday, May 14, 2003

detnews
 SITE INDEX

- Homepage
- Search
- CyberSurveys
- Horoscope
- Lottery
- Michigan's Best
- Weather
- Staff

FORUMS

- News Talk
- Autos Talk
- Big 10 Talk
- High Schools
- Lions Talk
- Pistons Talk
- Wings Talk
- Tech Talk
- Tiger Talk
- Weight-loss

NEWS

- Autos
- ▶ Insider
- ▶ Auto Show
- ▶ Drive
- ▶ Joyrides
- Business
- ▶ Careers
- ▶ Money & Life
- Census
- Columnists
- Commuting
- Detroit History
- Editorials
- Metro / State
- ▶ Livingston
- ▶ Macomb
- ▶ Oakland
- ▶ Wayne
- Nation / World
- Obituaries
- ▶ Death Notices
- Politics / Govt.
- Real Estate
- Religion
- Schools
- Special Reports
- Technology

SPORTS

- Sports Insider
- ▶ Lions/NFL
- ▶ Red Wings/NHL
- ▶ Pistons/NBA
- ▶ Shock/WNBA
- ▶ Tigers/Baseball
- ▶ MSU

GM moves to make big vans safer

15-passenger units will get stability control systems in '04

By Jeff Plungis / Detroit News Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Responding to concerns about rollover crashes, [General Motors Corp.](#) said Tuesday it would begin equipping all of its 15-passenger vans with stability control systems.

GM will equip all of its GMC Savana and Chevy Express vans with the systems in the middle of the 2004 production cycle.

"By adding this system, we will take what we believe is already a very safe vehicle and make it even better," said Ray Chess, GM vehicle line executive for commercial trucks and vans.

The systems, which GM calls StabiliTrak, allow drivers to better maintain control of their vehicles in emergency driving situations. The systems use sensors to recognize wheel skid and correct understeer or oversteer and use the brakes to keep the vehicle on course.

Automakers have been under increasing pressure to look at the safety of 15-passenger vans.

Last November, the National Transportation Safety Board wrote to GM President and CEO Rick Wagoner and Ford Chairman and CEO William Clay Ford Jr., asking that the two companies evaluate the potential of stability control systems, in the wake of a broad investigation into 15-passenger van safety.

In addition, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the chief regulator of the auto industry, has expressed concern about 15-passenger van safety.

In each of the past two years, NHTSA has issued unusual "consumer advisories" about the propensity for the large vans to roll over, especially when fully loaded with passengers.

Ford spokeswoman Carolyn Brown said the company was working with the NTSB and NHTSA to evaluate safety enhancements for the vans.

"We're not ready to make any announcements," Brown said. "We're looking at a number of technologies."

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- Browse the Classifieds
- New & Used Cars
- Employment
- Homes or Apartments
- Shop Online

Home Delivery Center

- Start home delivery
- Renew subscription
- Customer service

Autos Insider

- Autos Insider index for Wednesday, May 14, 2003
- Cadillac stars in 'Matrix'
- Car interior suppliers now in the driver's seat
- Automakers face record levels of overflow vehicles
- Saturn Electronics sticks with automotive industry
- **GM moves to make big vans safer**
- Honda ratings raised to A1 by Moody's; outlook stable
- Mitsubishi had fourth-quarter loss on market decline
- Mitsubishi Motors targets 3,000 monthly Grandis sales
- VW's Audi boosts 1st-quarter sales, sees full-year growth
- Volkswagen begins 4.5 billion-euro bond sale
- Fiat losses widen in first quarter
- Honda, Nissan, Toyota rated tops by suppliers
- \$300 million Visteon headquarters fuels Van Buren Township boom
- Court orders Delphi to pay former supplier \$37 million
- Fiat first-quarter net loss widens
- Hyundai Motor's first-quarter profit falls 29 percent
- Mazda Corp. more than doubles profits
- Oldest dealership models Ford mettle

▶ Previous Story ▶ Next Story