

Max Mosley

Euro NCAP President | 1997 – 2004

Max Mosley was President of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile from 1993 to 2009, and was the first President of Euro NCAP, from 1997 to 2004. Today he is the chairman of Global NCAP.

SAFETY DOES SELL

The phrase 'straight talking' could have been coined for Max Mosley, who relied on astute political insight and an incisive understanding of human nature, to advance car safety at a time when it was widely believed 'safety doesn't sell'.

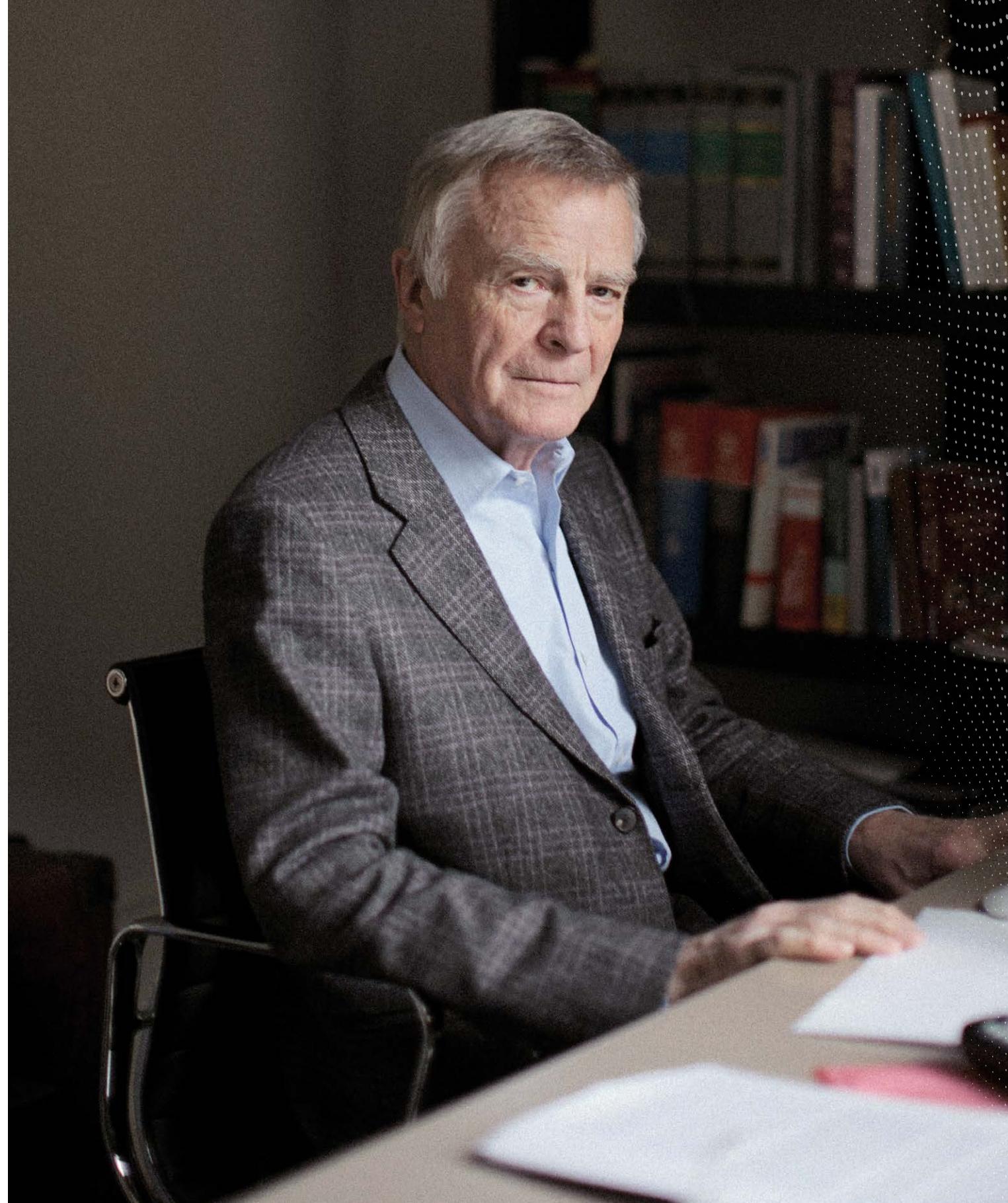
It all began for Mosley on the race track when he bought his first racing car - a U2, in 1966 - after qualifying as a barrister, and earning extra cash by teaching law in the evenings. He competed in over 40 races in 1966 and 1967, winning 12 and setting several class lap records. In 1968, he even competed in European Formula Two, then just a step down from Formula One.

"What really started my interest in safety was the racing cars being obviously really dangerous - and the governing body in those days having a completely different view," says Mosley. "Their attitude was 'if you want to do it, take the risk'. That seemed completely irrational so later on, when I found myself in a position to do something about safety for road and racing cars, initially through FISA (which became the FIA) and then Euro NCAP, that's what I did."

Reflects Mosley: "Most people start taking a real interest in road safety because someone they mind about has been killed or injured. That wasn't the case for me - I felt strongly that if you want to occupy a position like heading up the FIA - or NCAP - then you must do something about it."

The biggest problem Mosley faced in the formative days of Euro NCAP was the motor industry's staunch opposition, based on a fear of costly new crash legislation. "I took the view that first of all it didn't matter - it wasn't my money! - and secondly, whether we raised the standards through legislation or consumer pressure it would be the same for manufacturers in the long run. Yes, it would be more expensive, but it would be the same for all of them; a level playing field."

To begin with, says Mosley, the motor industry was 'absolutely against' NCAP's plans. He quickly realised however that it would take the support of only one key industry figure to "break the dam" - leading to a personal, pivotal meeting with Louis Schweitzer, head of Renault.



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“Schweitzer realised that the old-fashioned ‘safety doesn’t sell’ attitude didn’t really apply. I’m sure he had a moral view too. So he decided to take the risk, get behind NCAP’s new crash tests – and Renault became the very first company to get a Five Star rating, for occupant protection for its Laguna, in 2001. It was remarkable,” says Mosley.

Renault’s escalating reputation for safety shook the motor industry, swiftly overtaking that of even Mercedes and Volvo, recalls Mosley. “Mercedes took the attitude that they knew what they were doing and did not need us to help. But we crash-tested their then C-class and it was awarded only two stars. That got them going.”

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CHANGING THE ATTITUDE

But what – other than the horror of motorsport accidents – drove Mosley while heading up Euro NCAP? “It’s about sitting in the rocking chair when you’re 80 and thinking I’ve actually achieved something worthwhile,” he replies. “It’s that simple, really. You never meet the people who are alive and uninjured

as a direct result of all the work that Euro NCAP has done, but you know they are out there, and that is deeply satisfying.”

He adds: “There’s that Stalin saying that one death is a tragedy and a million is a statistic and unfortunately, people tend to be a bit like that with road safety. They see it as an act of God that thousands of people get killed. I could never go with that; it was obviously capable of being improved.

“The strange thing is that people get absolutely horrified when there’s something like a terrorist massacre – and quite rightly. They are horrified because you get personal stories, about the little girl, the mother, absolutely awful. But with road accidents you don’t get those personal stories, it’s just a large figure.

“It annoys politicians but I frequently tell them: ‘If you had to go with the police when they knock on the door to tell a family there’s been a road crash, you’d change your whole attitude’. They would begin to understand what it really means. It’s just a lack of imagination not to see how absolutely dreadful that is.”

IT REALLY, REALLY MATTERS

It wasn’t just politicians – and the motor industry – that Mosley had to win over in the early days of Euro NCAP, however. “What was more difficult was in the FIA, where finding the initial funding for Euro NCAP meant taking money away from motorsport. We had people saying ‘why are you spending that money on road car safety? Why not spend it on helping young go-kart drivers’, for instance.

“I would say ‘because it really, really matters’. Eventually, I rather gave up with the moral argument because it did not work. Instead, I started pointing out that being able to say we were saving thousands and thousands of lives on the road, as a result of motor sport, would help us politically, especially in the event, perhaps, of another big incident, like the 1955 crash at Le Mans.”

Again, Mosley won the argument. “The first decent money going into crash testing when we started NCAP was the equivalent of £1 million that we took, effectively, from the FIA sporting side.”

Mosley says his team’s major achievements, while forming NCAP, and after becoming its first President in 1997, were establishing a strict set of crash standards that resonated with consumers – while keeping the industry on-side.

BECAUSE LIVES MATTER

Today, he says, the biggest challenge facing the motor industry is the swift introduction of self-driving vehicles – and raising the standard of cars sold in lower income countries up to the safety standards of cars sold elsewhere.

“Big companies still sell cars in lower and middle income countries, which they know are unsafe,” says Mosley. “I think it’s immoral to put it bluntly. I can understand they want to make a profit but they ought to say to each other ‘let’s all up the standards and it will cost the same to everybody. Because lives matter.”

Adds Mosley: “Most accidents are human error and all humans make errors, even really good drivers. The only difference between a good driver and a bad driver in my opinion is the good driver usually knows when he’s made a mistake whereas the bad one probably doesn’t. Autonomous vehicles will remove a huge proportion of the accidents, and traffic will flow better, pollution will be reduced, accidents will come down.”

Mosley believes that ‘every conceivable inducement’ should be given to the industry to introduce self-driving vehicles as quickly as possible: “If you change the car parc quickly you get the safety benefits quickly and save more lives. This is the challenge now.”

Underpinning Mosley’s huge car safety achievements is a simple belief: “People used to say we need to halve the deaths and I said no, that means half of

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them’s alright. Today the objective has to be zero deaths. We’ll probably never really get to zero but it’s a bit like the aviation industry where the objective is no crashes. They wouldn’t say ‘fewer crashes’. Now it’s got to be the same on the roads too.”