

Finally, the key to back-seat driving

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Sam Hall

Motoring Writer

Parents will be able to remotely control how fast their children can drive the family car, thanks to the latest technology.

Ford Australia this week rolled out its industry-first MyKey function, allowing parents to control their vehicle's settings using a digitally programmed key. The technology can control a car's speed, its music volume, disable the radio until the seatbelts are fastened and prevent de-activation of traction control.

MyKey is being touted as a life-saving technology, with claims that it could potentially lower insurance premiums in family cars when a young driver is nominated.

Ford Australia says the technology will ultimately prevent more deaths among 15 to 24-year-old motorists, now heavily overrepresented in Australian crash statistics.

"It's all about providing warnings and really raising the awareness of the driver by adjusting some of the settings without being overly prescriptive," Ford Australia boss Bob Graziano said.

MyKey works by recognising different keys for the same car and adjusting the vehicle settings according to owner requirements.

Fairfax sampled the system in Victoria this week in the new Fiesta ST city car - the first Ford to be fitted with the technology. With a pre-programmed secondary key, a chime alert sounded at 70km/h, the car could not exceed 140km/h and it was not possible to turn the stability control off. Replacing the secondary key with the primary key, usually held by the parent, restored the factory settings, including an unlimited top speed of 226km/h.

The system is said to be completely hack-proof.

Raphael Grzebieta, chairman of road safety at the injury risk management research centre at the University of NSW, described the technology as a breakthrough.