Chapter 13

The Fiat Autonomy Programme

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Fiat Group
Background
Alessandro Coda, has led the Fiat Autonomy Programme for the past seven years. Through this programme, a major vehicle manufacturer has worked on making its products accessible, not just to older people who can suffer from multiple minor disabilities that make getting in and out of cars, reading the instruments, and the physical side of driving difficult, but to people with quite specific and severe disabilities.

The Autonomy Programme, which is based in Turin, involves the entire Fiat Group, and explores ways in which technology and ergonomics can be effectively applied to meeting the mobility needs of disabled and older people. This is done with a keen eye on the commercial and competitive potential of integrating those needs with mainstream vehicle development. Innovation is of paramount importance in the modern vehicle market, and so research, and technological and ergonomic validation are taken very seriously, in particular where the needs of disabled customers are concerned.

The Autonomy Programme began in 1994 at Fiat Auto, the Italian core of the Fiat Group. The idea was to promote and facilitate mobility for people with reduced physical capabilities. Fiat has since extended the programme and involved all the companies within the Fiat Group in a drive to present itself as a provider of private cars and public service vehicles that offer better mobility for all. Customer satisfaction is of key importance to Fiat so this goal is carefully aligned with the company’s overall business strategy.

The Fiat Group programme was launched publicly in 1998, at the Bologna Motor Show, with demonstration vehicles on show. Since then it has been promoted, at the Paris Motor Show in Spain, at the Mobility Road Show in England, in Brussels, in Warsaw, returning to Bologna in 2002 and also in Brazil in 2003. There are some main aspects to the programme: vehicle accessibility, vehicle driveability, mass transport and guidelines. While the private car is important, public transport is a key part of the programme as are farm machinery and other working vehicles. Guidance is important too, both for Fiat’s design teams, and also for the dealers and salespeople who interface with the public.

Production modifications
Some examples will demonstrate the progress made under the programme. First, in the private car sector, a range of devices has