

Winners of Cars.co.za Consumer Awards – powered by WesBank

The 2016/17 Cars.co.za Consumer Awards programme – powered by WesBank – concluded with the announcement of the thirteen best-considered new purchases in their respective categories of the South African new vehicle market, as well as the overall Brand of the Year, on 19 January 2017.

Established to be the most prestigious, credible and influential awards programme in the South African motor industry, the second iteration of Cars.co.za Consumer Awards was distinguished by two significant factors: it was backed by the biggest provider of vehicle finance in South Africa and, in conjunction with the 13 judges' scores, the findings of the Cars.co.za's Owner Satisfaction Survey (in association with Lightstone Consumer) had a substantial (50%) weighting on the final results, excluding the Brand of the Year award, which was based entirely on the Survey data.

The winners are:

Premium Hatchback of the Year	Volkswagen Golf GTI DSG
First Class Car of the Year	BMW 750Li Design Pure Excellence
Leisure Double-cab of the Year	Ford Ranger 3.2 Wildtrak 4x4 Auto
Executive Sedan of the Year	Jaguar XF 25t Portfolio
Premium SUV of the Year	Volvo XC90 T8 Twin Engine Inscription
Business Class of the Year	Audi A4 2.0T FSI Sport S tronic
Compact Family Car of the Year	Suzuki Vitara 1.6 GL+
Fun Car of the Year	Volkswagen Golf GTI Clubsport DSG
Lifestyle SUV of the Year	Land Rover Discovery Sport TD4 S
Compact Hatchback of the Year	Opel Corsa 1.0T Enjoy
Budget Car of the Year	Suzuki Celerio 1.0 GL
Performance Car of the Year	BMW M2 M-DCT
Family Car of the Year	Volkswagen Tiguan 1.4 TSI Comfortline DSG
Brand of the Year	Suzuki

Cars.co.za's awards programme has a multi-faceted judging process, based on inputs from seven members of the experienced editorial team and six respected guest jurors drawn from specialist fields. The combined jury allocated scores to the three finalists in each category based on their assessments from two test days (on which available vehicles were compared back-to-back).

Once the judges' scores were tallied and audited, the brand-specific data from the Cars.co.za Owner Satisfaction Survey, which incorporates feedback from thousands of South African new vehicle owners, based on their experiences of their vehicles (must be less than five years old and serviced through franchised outlets), was factored in for the purpose of calculating of the final results.

The prestigious Brand of the Year award, however, was determined solely by brands' ratings in the Cars.co.za's Owner Satisfaction Survey (in association with Lightstone Consumer), which was compiled from thousands of surveys completed between September 2015 and December 2016. Consumers rated the brands in terms of: after-sales service, overall ownership experience and sales processes of its dealerships. Changes in market share were also factored into the final standings.

Highlights from the 2016/17 Cars.co.za Consumer Awards – powered by WesBank

- Volkswagen dominated with 3 category wins: Premium Hatchback, Family Car and Fun Car
- BMW and Suzuki won two categories each; it was the first awards garnered by the Japanese brand, which also succeeded Toyota as the overall Brand of the Year for 2016/17.
- The Cars.co.za Owner Satisfaction Survey had a big impact on the programme; it determined the final results in three of the categories
- The Volkswagen Golf GTI DSG, Land Rover Discovery Sport and Volvo XC90 defended their titles, although the latter two won with different derivatives than in 2015/16.
- Certificates of merit were awarded to other brands that finished in the Top Five rankings of the Cars.co.za Owner Satisfaction Survey: Audi, BMW, Mazda, Mercedes-Benz and Toyota.

Complete list of winners

Premium Hatchback of the Year

Volkswagen Golf GTI DSG

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: had to be a C-segment hatchback/crossover with a list price of between R350 000 and R500 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): electronic stability control, dual front, side and curtain airbags. The most important judging factors were: a balance of efficiency and performance, practicality, brand strength, design and quality appeal, ride/handling, safety, as well as in-car entertainment systems and connectivity.

"I'm not surprised the GTI defended its title. Given its blend of occupant comfort, premium features and finishes, plus driving enjoyment, it has a maturity that other hot hatches lack." — David Taylor

Runners-up: BMW 120i 5-dr M Sport Auto, Mercedes-Benz A220d Style Auto

First Class Car of the Year

BMW 750Li Design Pure Excellence

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of more than R1 million at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016). The most important judging factors were: powertrain technology, luxury features, brand prestige and exclusivity, design and quality appeal, driving dynamics, ride comfort and overall refinement.

"The BMW 750Li Pure Design Excellence was a more than worthy winner in a category filled with equally impressive machines. The new age technology found in the car, coupled with its dashing good looks and presidential appeal, set it apart." — Francisco Nwamba

Runners-up: Mercedes-Benz S500e L, Range Rover SDV8 LWB Autobiography

Leisure Double-cab of the Year

Ford Ranger 3.2 Wildtrak 4x4 Auto

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: had to be a double-cab bakkie with a turbodiesel engine and four-wheel drive, with a list price in excess of R450 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016). The most important judging factors were performance, space and practicality, occupant comfort, all-surface ability and safety.

"The Ford Ranger 3.2 Wildtrak 4x4 Auto features attractive styling and excellent off-road capability that's tough to beat in the leisure double cab segment." — Gero Lilleike

Runners-up: Toyota Hilux 2.8 GD-6 Raider 4x4 Auto, Volkswagen Amarok 2.0 BiTDI Highline 4Motion

Executive Sedan of the Year

Jaguar XF 25t Portfolio

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a D/E-segment sedan (or so-called four-door "coupé") with a list price of between R750 000 and R1 000 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016). The most important judging factors were: powertrain technology, brand strength, design and quality appeal, driving dynamics, technological features and occupant comfort.

"The Jaguar has an intrinsic elegance to it, which is reflected in its performance and driving experience. Its comfortable, refined cabin underlines its executive sedan status." — Kojo Baffoe

Runners-up: Mercedes-Benz E220d Avantgarde, Lexus GS 350 F-Sport

Note: The Mercedes-Benz E220d Avantgarde received a zero score from the judges as a test vehicle was not provided for the evaluation days. The brand concerned accepts the decision as fair.

Premium SUV of the Year

Volvo XC90 T8 Twin Engine Inscription

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of between R750 000 and R1 200 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016) and it had to be a large SUV (or its crossover derivative) with all-wheel drive as a standard feature. The most important judging factors were powertrain technology, luxury features, brand strength, design and quality appeal, driving dynamics, space and practicality.

"The XC90 was a clear winner in this category. I loved its infotainment system and plethora of on-board technological features; the Volvo embodies a premium driving experience." — Nafisa Akabor

Runners-up: Audi Q7 3.0 TDI quattro, Jaguar F-PACE 30d R-Sport

Business Class of the Year

Audi A4 2.0T FSI Sport S tronic

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of between R500 000 and R750 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): at least six airbags, as well as electronic stability control. The most important judging factors were powertrain technology, luxury, brand strength, design and quality appeal, driving dynamics and technological features.

“With the new A4, Audi has done the unexpected: it has turned the A4 into something that rivals its competitors in the bends. The newcomer’s interior quality is unrivalled in its class.” — Ashley Oldfield

Runners-up: BMW 330d M Sport sports-auto, Mercedes-Benz C250 AMG Line

Note: The Mercedes-Benz C250 AMG Line received a zero score from the judges as a test vehicle was not provided for the evaluation days. The brand concerned accepts the decision as fair.

Compact Family Car of the Year

Suzuki Vitara 1.6 GL+

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of between R250 000 and R350 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS, electronic stability control, a minimum of four airbags, air-conditioning, split/folding rear seats and a service plan. The most important judging factors were: balance of fuel economy and performance, space and practicality, design and quality appeal, occupant comfort and safety features.

“The Vitara is an excellent all-rounder, with a level of practicality that you’d expect from a bigger SUV, as well as a smooth engine which delivers excellent fuel economy.” — Ciro de Siena

Runners-up: Nissan Qashqai 1.2 Visia, Renault Captur 1.5 dCi Dynamique

Fun Car of the Year

Volkswagen Golf GTI Clubsport DSG

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of less than R600 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016) to ensure that this category isn’t dominated by extravagant exotic vehicles. The most important judging factors were drivetrain engagement, entertaining handling, sensory appeal and the number of standard features.

“The Clubsport made me feel like I was at the wheel of ‘a racing car’. I loved its responsiveness, the exact reactions to driver inputs and, especially, the overall composure of the car.” — Khutso Theledi

Runners-up: Mazda MX-5, Mini John Cooper Works sports-auto

Lifestyle SUV of the Year

Land Rover Discovery Sport TD4 SE

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of less of between R500 000 and R750 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): electronic stability control, at least six airbags, split/folding rear seats, a minimum ground clearance of 180 mm and all-wheel drive capability. The most important judging factors in this category were performance, space and practicality, in-car entertainment systems, cabin comfort and all-surface ability.

“The Discovery Sport seems to have it all - a desirable badge, genuine off-road ability, a luxurious and well-made cabin and even excellent performance/efficiency.” — Hannes Oosthuizen

Runners-up: Ford Everest 3.2 4WD Limited, Toyota Fortuner 2.8 GD-6 4x4 Auto

Compact Hatchback of the Year

Opel Corsa 1.0T Enjoy

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of between R160 000 and R250 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS, electronic stability control, dual front airbags, air-conditioning, USB/Aux audio support and a service plan. The most important judging factors were balance of fuel economy and power/performance, value for money, practicality, brand strength, design and quality appeal, ride/handling prowess and safety.

“The Corsa is just beautiful: It rides comfortably, yet it’s dynamic, corners confidently and is anything but sluggish. There is definitely an element of fun to the car; I could not fault it.” — Wendy Knowler

Runners-up: Honda Jazz 1.2 Comfort, Volkswagen Polo 1.2 TSI Comfortline

Budget Car of the Year

Suzuki Celerio 1.0 GL

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of R160 000 or less at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS and dual front airbags. The most important judging factors were: fuel economy, value for money, practicality and brand strength.

“Although the Celerio is not the most spacious car in its segment, its standard specification list is long, the engine feels surprisingly perky and Suzuki’s reputation counts for a lot.” — Mike Fourie

Runners-up: Renault Sandero Expression, Toyota Aygo 1.0 X-Play

Performance Car of the Year

BMW M2 M-DCT

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of between R600 000 and R1 000 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016) to ensure that the category isn't dominated by exorbitantly expensive exotic cars. The most important judging factors were: driving engagement, handling, sensory appeal and standard features.

"The M2 is excellent. It's so powerful that you'd expect it to become easily unhinged, but it's beautifully composed. It's certainly engaging to drive... it keeps a driver on their toes." — Eddie Kalili

Runners-up: Ford Focus RS, Mercedes-AMG A45 4Matic

Note: The Mercedes-AMG A45 4Matic received a zero score from the judges as a test vehicle was not provided for the evaluation days. The brand concerned accepts the decision as fair.

Family Car of the Year

Volkswagen Tiguan 1.4 TSI Comfortline DSG

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: an automatic-transmission vehicle with a list price of between R350 000 and R500 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (September 1 2016), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS, electronic stability control, a minimum of six airbags, split/folding rear seats, air-conditioning and a service plan. The most important judging factors were: engine flexibility, fuel economy, space and practicality, design/quality appeal, comfort, safety and in-car entertainment.

"I favour practical cars and there's so much to like about the Tiguan that I am tempted to buy one for myself. The Volkswagen exudes quality from design to finish and looks fantastic." — Juliet McGuire

Runners-up: Hyundai Tucson 2.0 Elite Automatic, Nissan X-Trail 2.5 SE CVT AWD!

Brand of the Year

Suzuki

The prestigious Brand of the Year was determined solely by the manufacturers' ratings in the Cars.co.za's Owner Satisfaction Survey, allied with market share change and resale value statistics per vehicle brand (supplied by Lightstone Auto). This recognition of Suzuki Auto South Africa, parallels the feat achieved by its British counterpart, which was recognised as the "most improved organisation" in The Institute of Customer Service's annual UK Customer Satisfaction Index in 2016.

"Cars.co.za (in conjunction with Lightstone Consumer) has developed the fairest and most credible formula for determining the winner in this category. It is entirely data-driven, and entirely determined by what consumers and the market believe to be happening in South Africa. Although this result may come as a surprise, it mirrors Suzuki's achievements in other markets." — Hannes Oosthuizen

The Cars.co.za Consumer Awards judging process

For 2016/17, the award categories were updated to take into consideration new vehicle sales trends (such as the increased demand for small/compact crossovers, the buying public's preference for SUVs over sedans and MPVs, as well as the introduction of several new and facelifted double-cab bakkies). The Cars.co.za editorial team considered each and every model in the new vehicle market — candidates were evaluated as individual models and not as parts of complete model line-ups. What's more, candidates were eligible for an award irrespective of when they were launched.

During the first phase of judging, the editorial team (Ashley Oldfield, Ciro de Siena, David Taylor, Francisco Nwamba, Gero Lilleike, Hannes Oosthuizen and Mike Fourie) researched, analysed and debated each of the cars on sale in South Africa. Contenders were measured against predetermined "pillars of success" to determine if they were eligible for an award in their categories. Five finalists were selected in each of 13 categories.

For the second phase, the Cars.co.za editors completed comprehensive scoring sheets to assess the semi-finalists in terms specific criteria, such as interior comfort, performance, efficiency, packaging etc. The weightings of the criteria were adjusted to reflect the requirements of the target markets of each category. Once the scores were tallied, the finalists were trimmed to three in each category.

For the ultimate phase of the judging process, the Cars.co.za editorial team was complemented by six guest judges: Eddie Kalili (Group Digital Editor – Destiny, Destiny Man and Sawubona), Juliet McGuire (Editor – Women on Wheels), Khutso Theledi (YFM presenter/DJ/car spinner), Kojo Baffoe (journalist/writer/media strategist), Nafisa Akabor (tech journalist) and Wendy Knowler (consumer journalist – The Times). Branko Brkic (Editor – The Daily Maverick) was absent due to illness.

The combined jury was presented an opportunity to re-evaluate vehicles that were chosen as finalists for the Cars.co.za Consumer Awards at a two-day event at the Gerotek vehicle testing facility, north of Johannesburg. Each of the 13 judges was required to test the finalists (except for those that were unavailable) on the predetermined course before completing their respective scoring books (replete with the weighted criteria points system). In between their driving stints, the judges did exhaustive static evaluations of the cars' packaging, build quality and interior features.

The test route comprised: a skidpan/gymkhana, 400 metre straight with emergency stop braking zone, a slalom course, emergency lane change test, a dynamic handling track and a variety of road surfaces to drive on, such as "Belgian" cobblestones, a ride and handling track up a mountain (for the road-biased vehicles) and a 4x4 course and sand pit (for appropriate 4x4 vehicles).

The results of the Cars.co.za Consumer Awards – powered by Wesbank, were verified by respected auditing firm KPMG.

The importance of incorporating consumer input

The fact that three models defended their Cars.co.za Consumer Awards titles that they won in the inaugural (2015/16) programme (two of them with different derivatives) underlines the quality of winning products and the sterling reputation of their manufacturers.

It must be noted, however, that the final results of three of the categories in the 2016/17 programme were determined by the findings of the Cars.co.za Owner Satisfaction Survey (as opposed to the cars that were favoured by the 13 judges).

About the event

The winners of the Cars.co.za Consumer Awards were announced at the Vodadome in Midrand on January 19 2017. The event was attended by approximately 300 guests including prominent South African motor industry executives, including representatives from vehicle manufacturers and importers, dealer groups, the finance sector, media agencies, social influencers and celebrities.

Comedian John Vlismas was the master of ceremonies and the awards (handcrafted car-key shaped trophies made from stainless steel, titanium, aluminium and acrylic) were handed over by the 13 judges as well as Cars.co.za CEO Ross McIlroy and WesBank CEO Chris de Kock.

Marketing guru Khaya Dlanga and Inês Jesus from Google Africa were guest speakers and entertainment was provided by Flash Republic. The event was digitally broadcast on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and, significantly, streamed live on Cars.co.za Youtube channel. The multi-platform broadcast allowed consumers, who are at the core of Cars.co.za's awards programme, to actively participate in the event. Furthermore, the #CarsAwards hashtag was the top trending topics in South Africa on Twitter during — and immediately after — the event.

Visit <http://www.carsawards.co.za> for more information about the Consumer Awards, including the winners and finalists, and view images of the award recipients that were taken at the event.

About Cars.co.za

Leading online automotive retail portal Cars.co.za, which lists tens of thousands of new vehicles stocked by more than 1 000 vehicle dealers countrywide, delivers in excess of 30 million page views per month to more than a million unique users. Cars.co.za has a presence on multiple digital platforms and it's ranked in the top 10 branded South African YouTube channels with 20 million views to date.

In 2015, Cars.co.za repositioned itself as a consumer champion by optimising its editorial content for the purposes of engaging and empowering its users. The recent Cars.co.za Consumer Satisfaction Survey, in association with Lightstone Consumer, and now the inaugural Cars.co.za Consumer Awards, underlines the company's objective to become the most comprehensive resource available to South African vehicle buyers, so that they can make the most-informed buying decisions.

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