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Announcement of Cars.co.za Consumer Awards winners

The Cars.co.za Consumer Awards was established to be the most prestigious, credible and influential awards programme in the South African motor industry. It recognises nine vehicles that represent the best-considered new purchases in their respective categories of the South African new vehicle market and names three special category winners: Game Changer, Design and Brand of the Year.

Cars.co.za's awards programme has a multi-faceted judging process, based on inputs from four members of the experienced editorial team and three highly respected external jurors (non-motoring journalists, who were selected for their analytical ability). The combined jury allocated scores to the three finalists in each category based on their assessments from a test day (on which all vehicles were compared back-to-back), as well as comprehensive feedback from thousands of South African new vehicle owners who participated in the Cars.co.za's Owner Satisfaction Survey, as well as statistics supplied by leading automotive industry data specialists, Lightstone Auto.

Whereas the winners of the Game changer and Design of the Year special categories were selected based on scores awarded by the editorial team members, the prestigious Brand of the Year award was determined solely by manufacturers' ratings in the Cars.co.za's Owner Satisfaction Survey (in association with Lightstone Consumer) and the market share change and resale value statistics of every vehicle brand during the period January to December 2015 (supplied by Lightstone Auto).

Complete list of winners

Compact Car **Ford Focus 1.0T Trend**

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price that did not exceed R250 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS, electronic stability control, dual front airbags, air-conditioning, USB/auxiliary audio support, Bluetooth compatibility and a service plan. The most important judging factors were: balance of fuel economy and performance, value for money, brand strength, design and quality appeal, ride/handling and safety features.

"Ford must have sharpened its pencils a lot to offer this much car at such a low a price. The Focus offers a very strong spread of talents." — Hannes Oosthuizen

Runners-up: Opel Corsa 1.0T Enjoy, Honda Jazz 1.5 Elegance

Premium Hatchback **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 R300 000 and R500 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015), 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.

"There's no denying the premium and luxury ability of the Golf GTI. The latest incarnation offers more all-roundedness than performance, giving it a maturity other hot hatches lack." — David Taylor

Runners-up: Mercedes-Benz GLA200 CDI Auto, BMW 120i 5-dr M Sport Auto

Business Class **Mercedes-Benz C250 AMG Sport**

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of between R400 000 and R700 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015), 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.

“This is a car that takes refinement, luxury and comfort to the next level. The C-Class ticks all the right boxes as a premium sedan.” — Ashley Oldfield

Runners-up: BMW 428i Gran Coupe Sport sports auto, Audi S3 quattro S tronic

First Class **Mercedes-Benz S500**

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 (June 22 2015). The most important judging factors were powertrain technology, luxury and on-board technology, brand prestige and exclusivity, design and quality appeal, driving dynamics, ride comfort and overall refinement.

“The big Mercedes-Benz has become a symbol for elegance, sophistication and intelligence. In fact, its grip on this market segment is so strong that it is called the S-Class class...” — Hannes Oosthuizen

Runners-up: Range Rover SDV8 Autobiography, Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG Coupe

Family Car **Citroën C4 Picasso e-HDI Intensive**

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of less than R350 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS, electronic stability control, six airbags, split/folding rear seats, service plan and air-conditioning. The most important judging factors were engine flexibility, fuel economy, space/practicality, design and quality appeal, comfort safety.

“The C4 Picasso is such a futuristic interpretation of a family car. The rest of the package is very impressive too, with many tech features and plenty of interior space.” — David Taylor

Runners-up: Nissan X-Trail 2.0 XE, Volkswagen Golf SV 1.4 TSI Comfortline

Leisure Car **Land Rover Discovery Sport SD4 SE**

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of less than R700 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015), 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.

“This vehicle is going to give rival brands massive headaches. Not only is it desirable in terms of brand and design appeal, but it does everything so well, too!” — David Taylor

Runners-up: Nissan X-Trail 2.5 SE CVT AWD, Toyota Land Cruiser Prado 3.0 TD TX

Premium SUV

Volvo XC90 D5 Inscription

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price in excess of R700 000 at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015) and it had to be a large SUV or its crossover derivative. The most important judging factors were powertrain technology, luxury features, brand strength, design and quality appeal, driving dynamics, space and practicality.

“Wow... Volvo’s hit the nail squarely on the head with the new XC90 – it quite possibly has the best cabin on the market and is very cleverly engineered. It’s refined too.” — Hannes Oosthuizen

Runners-up: BMW X5 xDrive30d Steptronic, Range Rover Sport SDV6 HSE

Fun Car

Audi TT s tronic

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 (June 22 2015) 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 latest generation of Audi TT epitomises the sports car category. Not only is it easy on the eye and brimming with technology, it’s also terrific to drive. The nimble handling and the backfires from the exhaust make for an entertaining combination.” — David Taylor

Runners-up: BMW M235i Steptronic, Renault Megane RS Trophy 275

Budget Car

Renault Sandero Expression

In order to have been eligible for this category, contenders had to meet the following criteria: a list price of R150 000 or less at the time of semi-finalist voting (June 22 2015), including the cost of any of the following features (if they were optional): ABS, dual front airbags and a service plan. The most important judging factors were: fuel economy, value for money, practicality and brand strength.

“The Sandero is modern and solid offering. Despite its keen price, it still manages to maintain excellent levels of standard safety equipment and in-car entertainment.” — Ashley Oldfield

Runners-up: Suzuki Swift 1.2 GL, Volkswagen Take up!

Design of the Year

BMW i3

Whether the topic is cars, architecture, furniture or even mobile devices, good design is never restricted to only premium products. The finalists in this category each brought fresh thinking to their respective market segments and demonstrated you don’t have to spend millions to turn heads. While there was no price limit to exclude exotica, our focus fell on more mainstream products.

Runners-up: Jeep Renegade, Mazda MX-5, Volvo XC90 and Citroën C4 Cactus

Game changer of the Year

BMW i3

Game-changing products can have a significant impact on the new vehicle market in a variety of ways: by increasing sales volumes, introducing new technology, improving brand perception or

simply representing a vast product improvement. Judges selected the finalists in this category from all the new vehicles that were launched in the South African market during 2015.

Runners-up: Ford Everest, Volvo XC90

Brand of the Year **Toyota**

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) during the period January to December 2015.

"We believe that 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. Toyota, of course, is a much-loved brand in this country, and our data confirms that its customers believe it is tops where it really matters. It is truly the people's champion." — Hannes Oosthuizen

The Cars.co.za Consumer Awards judging process

The Cars.co.za Consumer Awards is different to other automotive-themed award programmes in a number of ways... 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 (Hannes Oosthuizen, David Taylor, Ciro de Siena and Ashley Oldfield) 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 nine 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 three guest judges who were selected based on their reputations for being no-nonsense fact finders and because they are not necessarily active in the automotive space. They were consumer journalist Wendy Knowler, The Daily Maverick editor, Branko Brkic and Business Day editor, Songezo Zibi.

The final judging day, which was attended by the combined jury, was hosted in Johannesburg in late 2015. It presented the judging panel with an opportunity to re-evaluate all the vehicles that were chosen as finalists for the Cars.co.za Consumer Awards. However, instead of completing the in-depth scoring sheets (with the weighted criteria points system) based on only their assessments, jurors awarded their scores by referring to the findings of the Cars.co.za Owner Satisfaction Survey.

The importance of incorporating consumer input

The Cars.co.za Owner Satisfaction Survey, developed in association with leading automotive data specialists Lightstone Consumer, incorporated feedback from thousands of South African owners (of vehicles newer than five years old), who rated their own cars for reliability, after-sales service, cost of ownership and general satisfaction. This credible, invaluable consumer input, allied with resale

value data per vehicle brand supplied by the Auto division of Lightstone, allowed the jurors to adjust their final scores to reflect consumers' experiences as well as vehicle brands' market performance.

"There are many awards programmes out there that claim public participation, but what we mean when we talk of consumer input, is not a popular voting mechanism," said Cars.co.za Consumer Experience Manager Hannes Oosthuizen. "We didn't want a 'beauty pageant'... we wanted real, credible input, and the only way to do that is for the public to give us their views on the cars they know best — the ones they own. The only way the public can impact the results of the Cars.co.za Consumer Awards is by completing our survey, done in partnership with Lightstone Consumer."

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

About the event

The winners of the Cars.co.za Consumer Awards were announced at Shine Studios in Braamfontein on January 14 2016. The event was attended by approximately 150 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.

The head of Cars.co.za's video division Ciro de Siena and comedian John Vlismas presented the awards (handcrafted car-key shaped trophies made from stainless steel, titanium, aluminium and acrylic); Mike Sharman — the owner of Retroviral Digital Communications — was the quest speaker. The event was digitally broadcast on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and, in a first for an automotive-themed awards ceremony in South Africa: the Periscope Live Stream App. The significance of the multi-platform broadcast was that it 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 one of 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 hundreds of vehicle dealers countrywide, delivers in excess of 25 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 6 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, underline 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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