

Race to AutoTrader SA Car of the Year comes to an end

The evaluation days for the 2019 AutoTrader South African Car of the Year (COTY) competition have been concluded, and the competition process is now one step closer to revealing which vehicle will win South Africa's most sought-after automotive title.

The two evaluation days took place at Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit and around the Velmore Hotel near Pretoria. The testing programme commenced with the 23 highly qualified jury members – all members of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists (SAGMJ), which organises the competition – heading for the racetrack, where five technical and revealing test modules were completed.



COTY judge Sean Nurse surveys the line up of finalists. Image by Chris Wall.

The first module – track testing – saw the jurors test the finalists at high speed around the Kyalami racetrack. The second – an emergency brake test and slalom exercise – shed light on the braking and handling capabilities of the 12 finalists. The third – a skidpan exercise – yielded further light on the vehicles' handling capabilities. The fourth – a lap around the punishing Kyalami handling track – also put the vehicles' handling and road manners under the spotlight. The final module – a demanding off-road track – tested the off-road prowess of those finalists with 4x4 capabilities (those being the Porsche Cayenne, Suzuki Jimny, Volvo XC40 and Mitsubishi Pajero Sport).



Honda Civic Type R tested at high speed. Image by Chris Wall.

The following day was dedicated to road driving and static evaluation. During this time, the jurors scrutinised the vehicles inside and out. According to Carl Wepener, 2019 COTY convenor, there are 11 voting elements. “We evaluate the exterior design; interior; technology; engine; transmission; engineering integrity, build quality and noise levels; ride, handling and brakes; driver assistance and safety systems; overall excellence; affordability/value for money; and sales figures,” he explains.

Once all the evaluation exercises were concluded, the 23 jury members had to score each vehicle in 51 different areas (covering the 11 voting elements itemised above). This is done for each and every finalist, meaning jurors have to generate 612 individual scores.



Suzuki Jimny put through its paces on the skid pan. Image by Chris Wall.

According to George Mienie, AutoTrader CEO, the judging process is one of the most comprehensive and thorough in the world. “The AutoTrader South African Car of the Year is, of course, the benchmark automotive accolade in South Africa. The winning car will represent innovation and ingenuity, while setting new benchmarks in its market segment. We are very proud to sponsor and endorse this world-class competition. I chatted to many of the jurors over the two evaluation days, and the competition is wide open this year. Right now, there is no clear winner. Whichever vehicle wins, it will be a big surprise!” he comments.

The overall winner, as well as category winners, will be announced at a banquet hosted by AutoTrader and the SAGMJ on 4 April 2019.

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