

Latest Ipsos quality study shows SA motor industry puts quality first

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Ipsos South Africa has announced the 2015 Product Quality Awards. This follows the Quality Awards Purchasing and Servicing Quality Awards which were announced in June this year. In 2014, the results of both surveys were announced simultaneously.



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What comes through clearly from these in-depth studies, which includes vehicles sold from January to December 2014 by manufacturers and distributors responsible for more than 83% of the country's annual sales volume, is that product quality in South Africa continues to improve.

The research of the customers' ownership experience follows a syndicated format with various manufacturers and distributors contributing ideas and funding. Any motor company can participate if they supply names for interviewing, agree to the rules of syndication and participate in meetings and decisions regarding the syndicate business in a transparent and open manner.

"Once again we have seen a marked improvement in quality during 2014, despite growing technological complexity in vehicles," commented the Ipsos Automotive Business Unit Director, Patrick Busschau. "Customers in South Africa are becoming increasingly demanding where product quality and general service levels are concerned, but the local motor industry continues to keep raising the bar or at least remains on a very high level."

Ipsos, and its forerunner, Synovate, has been involved in competitive customer satisfaction surveys for the motor industry in South Africa since 1991, so has been able to track the improvement over 24 years. The surveys have three components: a competitive customer experience benchmarking measurement of the sales and service satisfaction of customers within franchised dealership networks, and a benchmarking of product quality with rankings based on problems per 100 vehicles (PP100).

Busschau went on to say, "What is particularly pleasing from a consumer's perspective is the general improvement across

all the major participating brands. Even those models that do not receive awards are produced to a very high degree of quality after steady improvement over the last ten years. We can all be very confident as consumers that the brands represented here are doing a really great job in providing us with product that is world-class." Busschau added, "This year we are celebrating distinction in a number of new categories including consistent excellence, new model entrants and most improved vehicles and these, along with the high number of Gold awards, should leave us with no doubt that the participating brands have a great deal to be proud of."

The studies are conducted using telephonic interviews with well over 30,000 vehicle owners over a 12-month period. The customer's purchasing and service experiences are measured 10 to 35 days after delivery, while product quality interviews take place 90 days from purchase.

The surveys are strictly controlled to ensure the highest levels of scientific validity and reliability. Sometimes the sample is too small for certain brands or models and the relevant manufacturer or distributor is not listed in the rankings. There are also certain other specific qualifying criteria that may exclude certain participating models from the study.

The best-performing vehicle manufacturers and distributors are rewarded for excellence with three levels of awards: gold, silver and bronze. Discretionary platinum awards are given for consistent excellence.

In terms of product quality, the industry average number of problems per 100 vehicles (PP100) has remained around the 30 to 40 mark since 2011, which is a huge improvement over the average 154 problems per 100 vehicles recorded in 2005.

Top performers

Toyota fared particularly well in the latest study, especially where its light commercial vehicle (LCV) range is concerned. After being awarded with four consecutive Gold Awards, Toyota receives Platinum Awards for Best Overall LCV Brand (PP100 score of 33), Best One Ton Double Cab LCV Brand (PP100 score of 34) and Best Local Plant Manufacturing LCVs (PP100 score of 31) in the latest results. Toyota - together with Kia - is also awarded with Gold as the Best Volume Passenger Car Brand with a PP100 Score of 31) and - along with Mercedes-Benz - was ranked first as the Best Local Plant Manufacturing Passenger Cars, with a PP100 score of 25.

As in the 2014 results, Mercedes-Benz continues to be a frontrunner in product quality. Not only did it receive a Gold Award as the Best Luxury Passenger Car Brand (PP100 score of 26), but after four consecutive Gold Awards, the E-Class was recognised as the Best Top Executive Model (PP100 score of 17) and received a Platinum Award. The A-Class received a Gold Award as the Most Improved Luxury Passenger Car (PP100 score of 22, compared to 39 in 2014). As mentioned before, it ranked alongside Toyota as the Best Local Plant Manufacturing Passenger Cars with a PP100 score of 25.

New vehicles

In the rankings for new vehicles that weren't included in the previous study, the Lexus ES was awarded Gold in the category for Luxury Passenger Cars (PP100 score of 10). The relaunched Nissan Sentra was the Best New Volume Passenger Car (PP100 score of 23) and Kia's new Sorento ruled the roost as Best New Recreational Vehicle (PP100 score of 22). The Best New Light Commercial Vehicle was the new Nissan Hardbody Petrol Double Cab (PP100 score of 24).

Most improved

A clear indication of just how seriously manufacturers and distributors take product quality and the feedback from their customers about their vehicles is the high level of improvement shown in the Most Improved Awards. As mentioned, jumping from a PP100 score of 39 in 2014 to 22 in 2015, the Mercedes-Benz A-Class is the Most Improved Luxury Passenger Car, alongside the Audi A3/S3 Sportback which improved from 38 to 22. Likewise, the Ford Focus Hatch improved from a 2014 PP100 score of 59 to 29 in the latest results, making it the Most Improved Volume Passenger Car.

In the category for Most Improved Recreational Vehicle, the Kia Sportage was the clear winner with a PP100 score of 34, compared to 55 in 2014. The Nissan Navara Diesel Double Cab also improved impressively from 56 to a PP100 score of 24 to be awarded Gold as the Most Improved Light Commercial Vehicle.

Winners per market segment

Looking at the entire spectrum of the South African vehicle market, Gold Awards were made to various manufacturers and distributors.

The Volkswagen Polo Vivo Hatch was the highest-ranked Entry Vehicle with a PP100 score of 30. With a PP100 score of 25 each, the Kia Rio Hatch, Honda Jazz and Toyota Yaris Hatch led the Small Hatch category.

The Top Hatch Gold Award winner was the Toyota Auris (PP100 score of 19), with the Chevrolet Sonic Sedan (24) and Nissan's Almera (26) pipping their competitors to the post for Gold in the Small Sedan category.

The Lexus ES (10) was the best Medium Sedan, the Audi A3/S3 Sedan (22), Nissan Sentra and Toyota Corolla (both on 23) were top of the Top Sedan log and the Mercedes-Benz E-Class (17) won the Top Executive Vehicle. Mercedes-Benz also scooped the Sports Coupé class with the C-Class Coupé (13).

The Toyota Avanza (24) was the best MPV, with the Volkswagen Tiguan (13) rated as the best Small Recreational Vehicle and the Audi Q7 (13) as the best Large Recreational Vehicle.

Nissan and Toyota were the clear leaders in the LCV categories. The Nissan NP200 (45) received a Gold Award as the best Three-quarter Ton Vehicle, the Nissan Hardbody Petrol Double Cab (24) was the best Petrol Double Cab and the Nissan Navara Diesel Double Cab (24) the best Diesel Double Cab. Toyota's Hilux Single Cab was the best Petrol Single Cab (26) and best Diesel Single Cab (31).

The Nissan NP200 (45) and Chevrolet Utility shared Gold in the Three-quarter Ton category, while the Ford Ranger Diesel Single Cab's PP100 score of 33 was enough to earn it gold in the Diesel Single Cab category.

"The local motor industry can be very proud of the latest Ipsos study results as a tribute to dedication to quality at all levels indicative of extensive quality improvement programmes and intensive staff training," concluded Patrick Busschau.

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