



The winner of the Leisure Double Cab category was the Toyota Hilux 2.8 GD-6 4x4 Legend Auto.



# Niche brands shine in Covid year

Wallace du Plessis

The theme for this year's #CarsAwards announced last week is "Be Part of the Journey – My Car, My Freedom".

In this year of Covid-19, a number of brands have done well. Niche brand Volvo won two categories, Volkswagen three, Toyota five, Suzuki won the entry-level car category for the third time and BMW and Land Rover won one each. It is clear that, to a certain extent, brand loyalty still influences the results somewhat in certain categories.

A good example of this is the Toyota Starlet winning the budget car award even though it is actually a Suzuki Baleno. The six winning brands are very influential in the areas they operate in and this is reflected in the results.

**Category winners for the 2020-21 #CarsAwards – powered by WesBank:**

- Budget Car – Toyota Starlet 1.4 XR
- Compact Hatch – Volkswagen Polo 1.0 TSI Comfortline Auto
- Compact Family Car – Volkswagen T-Cross 1.5 TSI 110kW R-Line
- Entry Level Car – Suzuki Swift 1.2 GL
- Family Car – Toyota RAV4 2.0 AWD GX-R
- Adventure SUV – Toyota Fortuner 2.8 GD-6 4x4 VX Auto
- Premium SUV – Land Rover Defender D240 HSE
- Executive SUV – Volvo XC60 D5 R-Design
- Crossover – Toyota C-HR 1.2T Luxury
- Premium Crossover – Volvo XC40 T5 AWD R-Design

● Hot hatch – Volkswagen Golf GTI TCR

- Leisure Double Cab – Toyota Hilux 2.8 GD-6 4x4 Legend Auto
- Sports Executive – BMW 330is Edition

Fifty percent of the final scores of the category finalists were determined by the rankings the vehicles' respective brands achieved in the Cars.co.za Ownership Satisfaction Survey – in partnership with data specialists Lightstone Consumer.

The data was based on owners' experiences of their vehicles less than four years old and serviced through franchised outlets. The survey affected the results in four #CarsAwards categories.

The Toyota Starlet (Budget Car) and Hilux (Leisure Double Cab), plus the Volkswagen T-Cross (Compact Family Car) and Golf GTI TCR (Hot Hatch) did not score the highest marks from the panel of judges following the evaluation, yet they emerged victorious because consumers rated their brands' experiences higher than those of their competitors.

"Right from the outset, the #CarsAwards was conceived to take a practical and usable approach to deciding the winners," said Cars.co.za consumer experience manager Hannes Oosthuizen. "Our awards programme is meant to be used as a buying guide that reaches the entire population, not only those who follow motoring publications."

Toyota won the #CarsAwards Brand of the Year title for a third time.

As opposed to the winners in 13 categories, who were decided by a

combination of judges' scores and consumer data, the recipient of the #CarsAwards Brand of the Year title was determined entirely by market data and the findings of the survey. Brands' respective sales and after-sales service ratings were particularly impactful, as were the percentages of purchase-price value the brands' finalists retained after three years of ownership.

What makes these awards important is the input from the buying and owning public. The 13 categories reflect the market as it is at the moment. Next

year they may perhaps include an EV category and combine the compact categories, depending on how the market develops. No less than seven categories were won by SUV/crossovers. Only one traditional three-box sedan stood out and that's in the sports executive class.

The next big awards are the annual official SAGMJ (motoring scribes' guild) AutoTrader COTY (Car Of The Year) awards, which have undergone big changes the last few years to more accurately reflect our market now.



The Volvo XC40 T5 AWD R-Design kicked dust in the eyes of competitors in the Premium Crossover category of this year's #CarsAwards. Photos: Roarke Bouffe