

Putting passion into publishing

By Chris Mberdyk: @chrismoerdyk

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About 29 years ago, in a tiny little town in backwoods South Africa, a five-year old kid got hold of an exercise book and started pasting in cut-out pictures of cars he had gleaned from throwaway magazines. Today, all these years later, he's still doing it. Except now he's not filling up old exercise books but rather something a lot more glossy. It's called *Car* magazine and that five-year-old car nut is its [new editor](#).



To say Hannes Oosthuizen has always been obsessed with motor cars would be putting it mildly. In a recent book he published, he called himself a "petrol head". That's also putting it mildly.

Human car parts

Because Oosthuizen's entire body is made up of car parts - from SAE40 motor oil flowing through his veins, a balding head that glints like a chrome tappet cover in the sunlight, to feet that are actually shaped like accelerator and brake pedals. He is the quintessential car fanatic who has just realised a three-decade dream of becoming editor of SA's most iconic motoring magazine.

He is a humble fellow. Quiet, respectful and enormously professional in the way that he goes about his job. One of the new breed of motoring journalists who, when they're on exotic overseas launches, gracefully decline nights out on the town to rather spend the night filing copy for their publications' websites, blogs and keeping up a steady flow of information on Twitter and the like (eg www.youtube.com/user/cartoday).

He admits to being a social media addict. "I check out all my social media sites before I go to bed and the minute I wake up." In his office, a separate screen shows a continuous twitterfall.

Why walk when you can drive?

Oosthuizen is under no illusions about the pressure on magazines in this day and age. He understands the massive competition and the need to be able to interact with readers and followers through a multitude of channels. Read *Car* the good old-fashioned way or the digital online version (www.carmag.co.za/digizine; follow him on (CARmag.co.za) or on his daily online blog (www.carmag.co.za/page/blogs) or almost continuous commentary on Facebook (www.facebook.com/CARmagazineSA) and Twitter ([@carmagsa](https://twitter.com/carmagsa); [@HannesO_CARmag](https://twitter.com/HannesO_CARmag)) and you will not be wrong in thinking that the guy doesn't actually ever stop working.

Actually, he doesn't and I am convinced that to Oosthuizen the idea of a bad dream is having to walk somewhere.

The March 2011 issue of *Car* magazine is the first edition that has the Oosthuizen imprint on it. He promised me, as someone representing his older readers, that in the next issue the type would be a bit larger.

Oosthuizen is determined to make the future of *Car* - the magazine and its various online guises - "less dry" and a bit more entertaining. He respects those editorial pillars that have made *Car* the great magazine that it is. All he is doing is making those pillars a bit more colourful, easier to see and understand.

But, the really big change will be that Oosthuizen and his team have decided to take *Car* magazine "off the launch cycle."

This means that content will not be dictated to by the motor manufacturers' launch agendas but rather by what readers want and when they want it. This does not mean, he insists, that *Car* will no longer be attending or reporting on launches. They simply won't be doing what every other motor journalist does at precisely the same time.

More pictures

Car magazine will become more picture driven and more columns will be added. "Readers want opinions, they want controversy, but it all needs to be balanced."

He insisted that *Car* would "not be scared" of criticising where criticism was justified and would be bringing back the "Speak Out" feature which every month will list the number of complaints relative to market share that *Car* receives from the consumer.

Car magazine will remain technical but "it will be a lot more understandable."

One of the reasons I chose to write about young Oosthuizen right now is because I firmly believe that print publications cannot survive without making themselves available online (yes, absolutely at a price and not for free) as well as by engaging with their readers through social media and websites. And secondly, I am a great believer that whatever the medium, the quality of content is directly proportional to both readership numbers and advertising revenue.

I am looking to Hannes Oosthuizen to prove me right.

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Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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