

Elantra is SA Car of the Year

 By [Henrie Geysers](#) 15 Mar 2012

The classy Korean sedan, the Hyundai Elantra, has won the prestigious title of South African Car of the Year. The winner was announced last night at a gala banquet attended by the who's who of the local motoring industry. The Kia Picanto 1.2 EX scored the second most points and the VW Jetta 1.4 TSI got the third most votes.



The top three beat seven other finalists, the Alfa Romeo Giulietta 1.4 125kW MultiAir Distinctive, Audi A6 3.0 T TDI Quattro, Citroen DS4 THP 200 Sport, Ford Focus 2.0 TDCI Trend Sedan Powershift, Mercedes Benz SLK 350 BlueEFFICIENCY, Peugeot 5008 2.0 HDi Active Man and the Suzuki Kizashi 2.4 SDLX Manual.

After an initial round of nominations by all the members of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists the 10 finalists were put through their paces (and under the microscope) by a jury of 30 judges who each had an allocation of 25 points to award to not more than five and not less than three of the finalists.

Although the competition was tough, as it is every year, the Elantra came to the party already armed with a display cabinet filled with awards and trophies, including that of the North American Car of the Year and it came as no real big surprise to see it being crowned South African Car of the Year.

Views on the winners and runners-up

As one of the jury members I scored the VW Jetta into first place with 10 points, the Hyundai Elantra into second position with 8 points and the Kia Picanto hard on its heels in third place with 7 points.

Here is how I described the winner and runners-up:



"Traditionally the jury members who evaluate the finalists for the coveted South African Car of the Year title weigh up key elements such as good value for money, reliability, running costs, build quality, safety features, passenger and driver comforters, resale value, design and looks (both interior and exterior) - and the VW Jetta 1.4 TSI 118kW Highline scores outstandingly well in all of these key departments.

"In terms of looks the Jetta is the epitome of understated elegance. It has an aura of interior and exterior class that one would normally associate with more expensive vehicles, including its pricier sibling, Audi. What's more it has all the comfort and ride confidence to match. It handles like a dream, even when pushed way beyond "normal" driving boundaries.

"What also elevates the Jetta into a class of its own is its impressive 1.4 TSI engine that does its job cleanly, frugally, and surprisingly enthusiastically up front. To add to the fun and driving pleasure it's linked to a butter-smooth six-speed manual transmission that most other carmakers can only envy.

"The torque-rich engine kicks out all of 240Nm from as low as 1500rpm and returns an average of 6.3 litres/100km while keeping emissions down to just 145g/km. It will sprint from zero to 100km/h in 8.3 seconds and gallop on to a top speed of 221km/h.

Confident, comfortable, classy

"It's a remarkably easy, gentle car to drive, equally at home doing duty in congested commuter traffic, purring along in cruise mode on the motorway or being pushed along a winding mountain pass. In a nutshell, the Jetta, with its affordable price tag of R274 500, is a confident, comfortable and classy sedan with a full house of safety and luxury features as well a warranty and service plan, that elevate it not only to top of its class but as worthy and deserving recipient of the prestigious SA Car of the Year title."



Of the Hyundai Elantra 1.8 GLS I wrote: "This neat and stylish sedan had an easy ride into the company of 10 finalists for the SA Car of the Year title because it proclaims excellent value for money in bright neon lights.

"With its stand-out European styling, full house of safety and luxury features and impressively pleasant and confident handling it illustrates how well the brand has shed the last vestiges of its bland Made-in-Korea image. Little wonder then that it was also recently crowned North America Car of the Year.

"In spite of its light price tag of R219 900 it is equipped with wall to wall safety and luxury kit. The car handles well in the predictable sort of way that makes it very appealing family transport.

A very good package

"Stand-out features include see-me-home lights that stay on for 30 seconds after the driver leaves the car, an automatic rain sensor for the windscreen wipers, rear parking sensors, electronic stability programme and a generous helping of airbags. As a package it is ahead of anything else in its segment and a strong contender for the SA Car of the Year title... a clear class winner with enough charisma, style and features so don't be at all surprised if the Hyundai gets the collective nod for the top honours."



About the Kia Picanto 1.2 EX I wrote: "This simply outstanding super-pikkie won the hearts of just about every jury member with its performance and looks. It is a real head-turner, oozing a peppy, youthful exuberance that places it comfortably in the "cool" bracket, particularly for the age group that fits its profile. But also cute and kinda smart enough to pull last time new car buyers.

"For a small car it reeks of quality and with an overall feeling of wanna-be premium it clearly underlines why Kia is such a strong and growing brand. However, the Picanto is more than just nifty. Give it stick and it will blow your mind with good ride quality and cheeky, confident manner.

"To top it, it also has airbags ABS brakes, central locking, power steering, alarm, aircon, electric windows, front-loading C and a five-year/100 000km warranty. Factor in fuel consumption of 5.0 litres/100km and emissions of 119g/km, the lowest parts price bin of all the finalists and a price tag of R118 995 and you have all the makings of a little car that could just upstage the apple cart and walk away with the title."

ABOUT HENRIE GEYSER

Henrie Geyser joined the online publishing industry through iafrica.com, where he worked for five years as news editor and editor. He now freelances for a variety of print and online publications, on the subjects of cars, food, and travel, among others; and is a member of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists. henrieg@iafrica.com
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