

Movements in motoring

 By [Mike Whitfield](#)

18 Jan 2016

Despite a challenging year for the automotive industry, car manufacturers remain upbeat and eager to embrace the trends set to dominate this coming year.



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Value for money/discerning customers

The car industry hasn't had a particularly good year. New car sales are challenging as higher interest rates and a weak rand have put pressure on prices; and high debt levels are squeezing access to finance. Cash-strapped consumers just can't afford 'big ticket' items. We all have to work harder.

We're going to see growth in affordable cars and customers demanding value for money in every purchase. That's true in South Africa but also across Africa where millions of people are joining the middle class and looking to buy their first cars.

These customers want cars that meet their aspirations in life. So manufacturers will be providing smart, accessible technology that gives drivers more freedom, more control to empower their everyday drives, and more options.

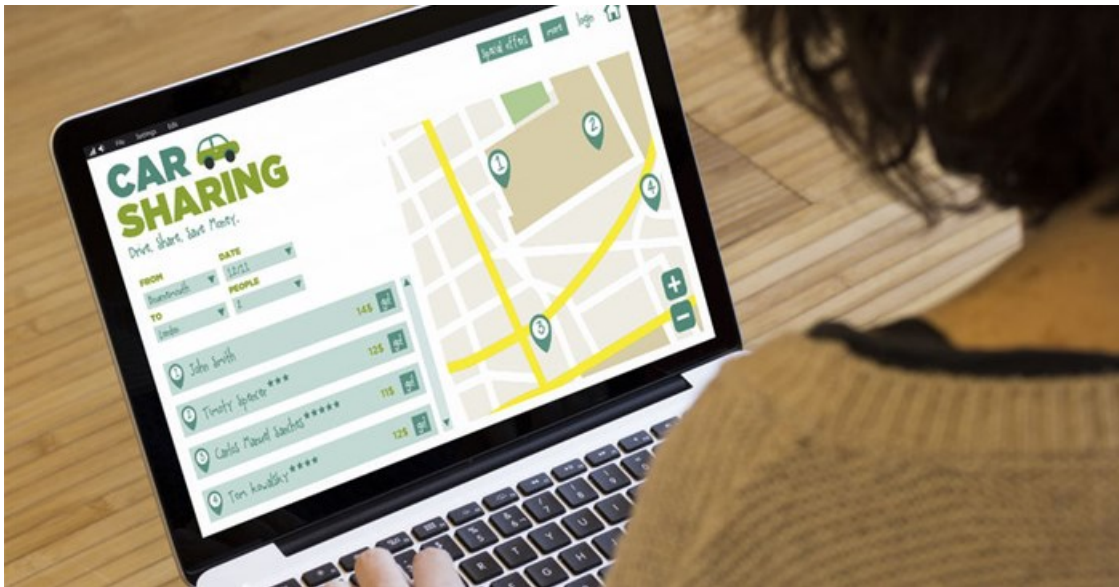
Crossover domination

Offering high ground clearance, crossover cars have become a popular choice for those attracted by a car that offers roominess, convenience and better visibility from a higher driving position. It's the ideal combination of a sports utility vehicle and a traditional car. Crossover vehicles, which not so long ago didn't exist, will become ever more common on our roads. Emphasis will be on smaller compact crossovers targeted at the young and urban adventurers.

Mobility sharing

Consumers need smarter and more flexible mobility solutions. The way we live our lives is changing at a rapid pace. Cities are becoming overcrowded, putting increased pressure on urban infrastructure and draining our energy supplies. To survive, our environment will demand greater connectivity between cities, consumers, technologies and businesses.

Electric vehicles are a prime example of how consumers connect within cities. People's desire to move around will not lessen. I foresee a trend in car sharing between colleagues and neighbours who work in the same city. As car manufacturers, we need to see how we take advantage of this opportunity and turn the car sharing concept into a business prospect.



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Saying no to CO2 emissions

As air pollution continues to threaten planet Earth, and governments around the world tighten environmental regulations, auto manufacturers are changing the way they make cars. The electric vehicle market will continue to grow, as well as hybrid cars. More countries will start to roll-out quick charger networks as they see the benefit of sustainable mobility. We are already seeing it in Japan where there are now more electric charging stations than petrol stations.

Connecting with customers

Car manufacturers will be connecting more with customers through sponsorships and other related brand activities. We have already seen how car brands are rising into recognisable and most loved brands in various local and global brand surveys. There is more visibility of car brands everywhere. The brand language is becoming more simplified and emotive. And the focus of advertising is on driving experiences instead of technical car features, which has previously been the norm.

Making our roads safer

Autonomous drive empowers the driver for an enhanced experience while improving safety on the roads. The building blocks towards full autonomous drive are already in vehicles: anti-lock brakes, active cruise control, blind spot warning and parking assist.

The capability to create and mass-market autonomous drive is largely already there. Societies will adapt to and accept the technology as they see the benefits of safer roads and a better driving experience.

ABOUT MIKE WHITFIELD

- Mike Whitfield is the MD of Nissan Group of Africa, former president of NAAMSA and deputy president of the AAAM
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