

Synovate Quality Awards 2006 winners announced

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Synovate has announced the winners of The Synovate Quality Awards 2006 for Product Quality. The highly coveted 2006 Synovate Quality Awards have been hotly contested, with the traditional stalwarts vying amongst themselves and against new entrants for top positions.

"Continuous improvement is obvious and the challenge to stay at the top of the rankings is becoming more difficult every year. Other good news is that the local producers are competing on an equal footing with internationally manufactured products and some locally built models are winning their individual categories," states Richard Rice, Automotive Client Services Director at Synovate.

"There has been a fair amount of change from the results last year and whilst the traditionally strong contenders continue to perform well, there are also some first time achievements for some brands and models. The ongoing introduction of new models into some of the segments has also resulted in shifts in the rankings," says Rice.

"Customers are really benefiting from the enormous focus that manufacturers are giving to the quality of their products," continues Rice, "and given that perceptions of quality are influenced by increasing customer expectations, the improvements that we have seen over the last few years have been remarkable."

The research is part of Synovate's Competitive Customer Satisfaction (CCSI) research programme which is the largest survey of its kind in the South African market. More than 55 000 vehicle owners are interviewed each year and the survey has been extensively used by the manufacturers for more than twelve years as the benchmark of vehicle quality.

"The awards have achieved high status because they are not based on a brief 'snapshot' of the industry but rather on research that is conducted over a long period of time with large samples of vehicle owners. The product quality survey typically occurs at 90 days of ownership and the age of the vehicle is carefully controlled to ensure that comparisons between models and brands are fair. Given the extremely robust methodology of the research, one can be sure that the winners in the individual segments and categories have truly managed to deliver class-leading product quality," says Rice.

Passenger Car Category Awards

In the **Best Local Plant Manufacturing Passenger Cars** ranking, Mercedes-Benz takes top position outright for the first time. BMW and Toyota continue to perform well in a tie for second place with Nissan. This is the first time that Nissan has achieved an award in this category.

Honda, a new entrant last year, has retained first position in the **Best Volume Passenger Car Brand Overall**. Chevrolet and Toyota, follow in tied second place. This is the first time that Chevrolet has achieved a podium position in this segment where a growing number of locally and internationally produced models line up directly against one another.

The **Best Luxury Passenger Car Brand Overall** goes to Mercedes-Benz, who has moved ahead of traditional rivals, Audi and BMW who are tied in second place. "Stiff competition in this segment is a given," explains Rice. "Exceptional quality is a prerequisite amongst buyers in this segment and with all three brands selling locally produced as well as imported models in a variety of segments, it is very difficult to dominate this category."

Light Commercial Vehicle Category Awards

The **Best One Ton Petrol Light Commercial Vehicle Overall** is headed up by Nissan and Toyota, the previous leader, in

a tie for first place. Second position in this category goes to Isuzu.

In the **Best One Ton Diesel Light Commercial Vehicle Overall** category, Nissan takes top spot on its own, followed by Toyota in second position with Isuzu taking third place.

For the **Best Local Plant Manufacturing Light Commercial Vehicles**, Toyota heads up the ranking in first position. Isuzu/Opel share a tied second place with Nissan.

The **Best Overall Light Commercial Vehicle Brand** is won by Toyota for the second year in a row whilst second position is a tie shared by Isuzu/Opel and Nissan.

"The variety of different positions that are occupied by the individual brands in the Light Commercial Vehicle categories shows how closely contended this market is. 'Bakkie' owners can be confident that their vehicles are getting the same level of attention as their passenger car counterparts," says Rice.

Passenger Car Segment Awards

Entry Segment: Newcomer Ford Ka steals first place in the entry segment this year. Toyota Tazz and the Opel Corsa Lite retain their places in the medals and tie for second.

Small Hatch: There was big change in this segment this year with only one of the previous podium winners featuring again this year. The new Toyota Yaris takes over top spot from the Honda Jazz, which moves to second place. The Toyota RunX 140 occupies third position.

"This segment is extraordinary in terms of the quality of product that is produced with all three medal winners delivering less than 75 problems per 100 vehicles," says Rice. "This is the only segment in the market that can boast such outstanding quality at the top end."

Top Hatch: The much improved Mercedes Benz A-Class moves into first place in this segment. Also creating a stir is the Audi A3 TDI, placed second in a tie with the Honda Civic Hatch.

Small Sedan: The Chevrolet Aveo 4-door steps up to the podium in first place. The Toyota Corolla 140i and Opel Corsa Classic stay in the medals with second and third place respectively.

Top Sedan: The Toyota Corolla moves up from its previous second place to first place this year. The Honda Civic and Nissan Almera, both newcomers to the podium tie for second place.

Medium: In this tough segment, the Mercedes Benz C-Class Petrol produces a very low problem count to take top spot. Tied in second place are the Mercedes-Benz C-Class Diesel and the Volvo S60, with their scores not far behind.

"The Medium segment is extremely competitive in terms of quality, with a large percentage of the models reporting an average of less than 100 problems per 100 vehicles," said Rice. "This means that this segment reported less than one problem per vehicle - an aspect that emphasises the high level of quality vehicles in this section of the market."

Top Executive: This segment sees little change - all three of the German brands retained medal positions. However the Audi A6 stepped up a notch and ties in first place with the Mercedes-Benz E-Class. The BMW 5 series moves into second place.

Sports/Coupé: The Mercedes-Benz C-Class Coupé maintains its number one spot in this segment. Two BMW models follow with the BMW Z4 and the BMW 3 Series Coupe / Cabriolet taking second and third position respectively.

MPV/Station Wagon: Again the Audi A4 Avant dominates this complex segment. The Chrysler Grand Voyager and Toyota

Corolla Verso enter the ranks for the first time in a tie for second place.

Small Recreational Vehicles: The top quality of the BMW X3 wins it a convincing first place. The Honda CRV moves into the medals, sharing second position with the Mitsubishi Pajero 3-door.

Large Recreational Vehicles: Toyota Prado proves itself once again and retains its top spot in this segment. A new medal winner, the Volvo XC 90 takes second place whilst the Mitsubishi Pajero 5-dr picks up third position.

Light Commercial Vehicle Segment Awards

Half ton: This segment is extremely tightly contested and all three medal winners tie for first place. Newcomer Fiat Strada, the Opel Corsa Utility and the Ford Bantam share top spot on the podium.

Small Petrol Single Cab: The Nissan Hardbody produces a great score to take first position with the Toyota Hilux and Isuzu KB sharing a close second position. "Interestingly, all three models produced scores that translate into less than one problem per vehicle," says Rice. "This level of quality is typically only found in the passenger car market and is a remarkable achievement for a 'workhorse' segment."

Large Petrol Single Cab: In this segment, the Nissan Hardbody shares top spot with the Isuzu KB. Toyota Hilux takes second position.

Diesel Single Cab: Toyota Landcruiser Pick-up takes top honours for the second year in a row. The Nissan Hardbody enjoys second position on its own and the Isuzu KB gets into the medals for the first time with third spot.

Petrol Double Cab: In a very closely fought battle, the Nissan Hardbody and Toyota Hilux share first place whilst the Isuzu KB takes second place.

Diesel Double Cab: The diesel models mirror their petrol counterparts with the Toyota Hilux and Nissan Hardbody taking a joint first position. Second position is occupied by Isuzu KB.

About the research:

These results form part of Synovate's Competitive Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI), and are based on interviews conducted with approximately 55 000 vehicle owners on an annual basis. Part of this survey includes a Product Quality measurement, which is commonly known as PP100 or Problems per 100 Vehicles. This survey measures the number of problems new car owners experience with their vehicles in the first few months of ownership.

Synovate is one of the largest research companies in the world. The company directly employs over 500 people in South Africa and conducts the largest competitive customer satisfaction survey in the country's automotive market.

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