

Hyundai Venue is the Indian Car of the Year 2020

The compact SUV wins by a narrow margin, taking on a bunch of tough competitors for the award

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The country's passenger car industry has had one of the worst performing years ever since the automobile sector was opened up in the early 1990s. After more than two decades of double-digit growth, the entire industry, across categories, has witnessed a massive shrinking of volumes. A near one-third fall in sales recorded by the market leader Maruti Suzuki has shaken the industry's performance report and has left many wondering if there is ever going to be a quick turnaround in fortunes for the passenger car segment.

The tightening of credit, the lack of confidence in salary growth in the near term, the general slowdown in new infrastructure development in our cities and the overall economic slowdown has adversely impacted the demand for new cars.

There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the transition to BS VI emission norms which is due to take effect from April next year, and also, in my view, there is the rising possibility of much lesser interest in personal mobility amongst the millennials. I believe that the passenger car has to ready itself for slower growth in new car sales, unless there is a significant increase in infrastructure development in our cities, including the setting up of new smart cities and satellite towns like Gurgaon, which has only risen over the past two decades to where it is today.

New cars and brands

Despite the gloomy scenario, the passenger

car industry has continued to invest in bringing in new models and with at least two new brands successfully foraying into the Indian market, there has also been an increase in installed capacity. Kia Motors, the Korean sister brand of Hyundai made a Big Bang entry here with its Seltos sports utility vehicle and has managed to make a mark for itself within a few months of launching the new model. The other brand that has carved a niche for itself with its value for money offering, unsurprisingly also in the SUV space, was MG Motor India with the Hector. Both these locally manufactured vehicles were contenders for the Indian Car of the Year award for 2020. Next year promises to be equally exciting with two other new brands that are entering the country. One will be French major Citroen and the other will be the second Chinese brand Great Wall Motors.

Every December, a bunch of us motoring journalists, from a varied range of publications, come together to evaluate the cars that were launched before November 30 of the year and vote for the most exciting and relevant vehicle. The ICOTY has become the most coveted award that recognises excellence in manufacturing, the most efficient, market relevant and technologically updated passenger car.

Making the cut

Cars and SUVs that have either been manufactured locally or assembled from completely knocked down kits in an Indian facility, and have been commercially

launched in the market here before November of that year qualify for the award and will be considered for the contenders list. ICOTY rules as per the constitution also mean that vehicles cannot be minor model modifications or mid-cycle facelifts for existing models. If a previous generation of the model is already in the market, then the new one has to be extensively re-worked, re-engineered and with new powertrains. The vehicles are then selected to form an initial list from which a final shortlist is chosen based on a range of parameters. The ICOTY 2020 award shortlist was pretty long with as many as 10 contending cars, all of which made it to the final list too. They included the Venue and Grand i10 Nios from Hyundai Motor India, the Kia Seltos, Maruti Suzuki Spresso and Wagon-R, Tata Harrier, MG Hector, Renault Triber, Nissan Kicks and Honda Civic. In comparison,



there were only 8 contenders for ICOTY 2019. Not just the number, but the final shortlist for this year included quite a few of the most significant new models that have been launched in many years. In that list, the Seltos, Triber, Venue, Harrier and even the Hector were extremely strong contenders. All of them turned out to be very relevant and mature vehicles that have since their launch proved that even in a damp market it is possible to find takers if they deliver the right attributes of a good car.

Winners all

This year's ICOTY jury round saw the induction of Grant Thornton as independent validation partner. Grant Thornton is one of the world's largest professional services, independent accounting and consulting



Dr Raghupati Singhania (right), CMD, JK Tyre & Industries, presents the 'The Indian Car of the Year 2020' award to Hyundai Motor India's Executive Director - Sales & Marketing, Bryan Dong Huwy Park (centre), and Director - Sales, Marketing & Service, Tarun Garg, for the Hyundai Venue

member firms providing assurance, tax and advisory services. After the voting process, which was overseen by Grant Thornton was completed, the results turned out to be a closely set contest. The Hyundai Venue took the ICOTY crown with 111 points. The runner-up was the Kia Seltos with 102 points and the Renault Triber was the second runner-up with 56 points.

The Premium Car award by ICOTY was the one new award category that was set up last year and in its second year the shortlist for 2020 included BMW's X4 and X5 SUVs and the 3 Series sedan, the Audi A6, the Jeep

Wrangler and Mercedes-Benz GLS. The winner of the Premium Car Award was the BMW 3 Series with 103 points, the runner-up was the BMW X5 with 102 points and the Audi A6 was the second runner-up with 67 points.

In addition to yours truly representing the Hindu Business Line, the other members of the ICOTY jury included Yogendra Pratap and Rahul Ghosh on behalf of Auto Today, Dhruv Behl and Ishan Raghava from AutoX, Aspi Bhatena and Sarmad Kadiri from Car India, Sirish Chandran and Anirudha Rangnekar from Evo India,

Pablo Chaterji and Karthik Ware from Motoring World, Bertrand D'Souza and Rohit Paraskar from Overdrive, and the independent jurors were Girish Karkera, Vikrant Singh and Kushan Mitra. In all six different partner publications and media brands are represented in the ICOTY 2020 jury.

The awards were presented at an award ceremony held in Delhi last week. The function was sponsored by JK Tyre and Industries. The tyre brand has supported the award ceremony since its inception in 2005.

