

Tesla shows times are changing being named carsales Car of the Year for 2015

Melbourne, 11 November 2015

Carsales has created its own piece of history by naming, for the first time, an electric car the winner of its prestigious Car of the Year title - handing the award to the Tesla S luxury sedan.

Even before it began selling its first car in 2008 (the Roadster), Tesla Motors, under the guidance of billionaire founder Elon Musk, was making an impression in the trillion-dollar motor vehicle industry. Today with global sales approaching 100,000 it continues to make waves.

"The all-electric sedan has grabbed headlines around the world. But behind the hype, the reality is it is a game-changer," said carsales CEO Greg Roebuck.

"While Tesla is a fledgling car company, it has set the tone for the next generation of automobile evolution. Tesla will change the auto industry. Companies with 100-year histories are scrambling to catch up.

"Tesla has done so with innovative technology and a fearless desire to redesign existing practices. The Model S is conventional in its looks, but ultimately unconventional in its execution. Its internet connectivity allowing vehicle updates and new features without the need to visit a service centre, is a true innovation and the real-time, always current, mapping which includes traffic info is a really nice touch," said Roebuck.

"Our aspiration at Tesla was to show that the Model S can truly be better than a petrol car, helping overcome perceived barriers and advancing the adoption of sustainable transport." said Heath Walker, Tesla Motors spokesperson. "This is now further enforced through winning carsales Car of the Year against a field of exceptional competitors."

Several manufacturers were multi winners - three for Mazda (CX-3, CX-5, 6 Wagon), Porsche for the Macan and Cayman, Mercedes-Benz for its C-Class and CLS-Class and Ford (Fiesta ST EcoBoost and Ranger).

For Mercedes, the C-Class (last year's carsales Car of the Year) and CLS-Class won both categories in 2014 showing it has a stranglehold on the prestige market.

Like the Tesla Model S, the Ford Ranger also won two awards - as the best off-road 4x4 as well as the Best Tradie Vehicle.

Despite all its troubles, the Volkswagen Golf retained its title as Best Family Car Under \$30,000 while Skoda won its first award with its Fabia as best First Car.

For six vehicles, they won their category for the second year in a row. They were:

- Mazda CX-5 for Best SUV under \$50,000
- Porsche Macan for Best SUV over \$50,000
- Porsche Cayman for Best Performance Car over \$100,000
- Mercedes-Benz C-Class for Best Prestige Car under \$100,000
- Mercedes-Benz CLS-Class for Best Prestige Car over \$100,000
- Volkswagen Golf for Best Family Car under \$30,000

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Tesla Model S also won the Best Green Car of 2015 – but a green car that can out-accelerate all but the very quickest supercars.

Mr Roebuck said the carsales judges praised the Model S for its advancement of technology, sorted driving dynamics and realistic real-world range – in top-spec more than triple that of other all-electric vehicles.

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He said Tesla's quality construction and user-friendly infotainment interface were also commended by the judges as was the quiet ride and spacious cabin.

"It's not perfect – but as a first 'mass market' product, Model S is very good and priced competitively against its luxury opposition. It is right up there with the best of the conventional vehicles eligible for judging in 2015. The Model S delivered on all our data-based criteria. It was very close to being named one of our Prestige class winners in addition to the Green award.

"The Model S is a deserved winner, and truly a car that will influence the design of vehicles globally for many years to come.

"Sales of Tesla in Australia are still in its infancy but there is no denying it is one of the most important cars ever invented. There is no doubt the accolades will continue for a long time yet," Mr Roebuck said.

For the judging criteria, Redbook data is a key factor in deciding carsales Car of the Year. The key point of difference between carsales Car of the Year and other awards is the combination of critical expert evaluation and purchase and ownership data. The motoring.com.au crew supply the former but the data and number crunching is the domain of Redbook.

All the 2015 winners - <http://www.carsales.com.au/caroftheyear/>

Category	Winner
Carsales Car of the Year 2015	Tesla Model S
Best First Car	Skoda Fabia
Best City Car	Mazda CX-3
Best Family Car under \$30,000	Volkswagen Golf
Best Family Car over \$30,000	Mazda 6 Wagon
Best SUV under \$50,000	Mazda CX-5
Best SUV over \$50,000	Porsche Macan
Best Prestige Car under \$100,000	Mercedes-Benz C-Class
Best Prestige Car over \$100,000	Mercedes-Benz CLS-Class
Best Performance car under \$100,000	Ford Fiesta ST EcoBoost
Best Performance car over \$100,000	Porsche Cayman
Best Offroad 4x4	Ford Ranger
Best Tradie vehicle	Ford Ranger
Best Green Car	Tesla Model S

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Best First Car - Skoda Fabia

With a price cap of \$20,000, this segment is hotly contested and the car that most impressed the carsales judges in 2015 was Skoda's new Fabia.

"We think the Fabia has the potential to truly resonate with new small-car buyers. In the same way that top athletes often need to mature emotionally before finding success, the Fabia is ready to flourish," Mr Roebuck said.

"Cars in this category need to be compact, easy to drive and park, and be safe for newcomers. But it also has to instil a sense of pride – after all you should love your first car."

The efficient 1.2-litre turbo-petrol Skoda Fabia runs on the smell of an oily rag but delivers big-car safety - five stars, six airbags and autonomous braking. All the boxes are ticked.

The Skoda's ride and handling also impressed our expert judges and its price and run figures stacked up along with the other all-important carsales data points.

There's plenty of room and pragmatic storage solutions. And in its own way, it's a great looking hatch. The icing on the cake for newbies is the intuitive integration of technology. Instead of learning to use a new infotainment system, just plug in your smartphone and your apps are mirrored on the large, high-resolution touch screen.

Skoda's tagline is 'Simply Clever' ... and we have to agree.

Best City Car - Mazda CX-3

The winner of this category was always going to be a small vehicle, able to navigate the concrete jungle with aplomb – but it had to be stylish and have substance.

Although a price cap is not an eligibility requirement for this category, a five-star ANCAP safety rating, Bluetooth telephony and a reversing camera are.

The CX-3 is our winner against a range of more expensive European city-slickers.

Mazda's smallest SUV rose to the top with its contemporary design, compact size, satisfying dynamics and value for money.

Its SUV stance delivers a commanding view and easy access. It delivers a strong list of standard features, such as reversing sensors, reversing camera, plus satellite navigation - all of which make the city slog just that little bit less stressful.

Offered with manual or auto transmissions, petrol or diesel engines, plus front or all-wheel drive, the CX-3 combines a number of appealing options into a compact, fun-to-drive vehicle.

And, of course, Mazda's overall popularity helps ensure strong projected resale values.

"At base levels the CX-3 misses out on little and for the price offers outstanding quality, a fun-to-drive character and decent comfort. It has everything and from what we can see, the CX-3 will certainly have enough to make it very popular indeed," Mr Roebuck said.

Best Family Car under \$30,000 - Volkswagen Golf

This category is perhaps the toughest in our awards. Criteria includes a \$30,000 or under price tag, unimpeachable safety and must-haves such as a reversing camera and Bluetooth connectivity.

That a range of size and vehicle types including SUVs and wagons are eligible makes the decision even harder to take out the top prize. So how does a small hatch fend off all-comers? Simply: you make that small hatch a Volkswagen Golf.

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Rarely does a car win the same category twice - but the Golf also won this award in 2014.

The Golf has been refined, re-defined and honed over seven generations. While it stays true to its original concept, it is now larger and safer. Regularly awarded for its cabin finish, durability and amenity, it's also one of a very small number of cars that defy socio-economic pigeon-holing.

With frugal but punchy turbo-petrol engines driving through a choice of manual or automatic gearboxes and independent suspension front and rear, the Golf family also leads the way in terms of powertrain and chassis refinement. It is simply one of the best drives on the road today.

Volkswagen may have its issues right now, but the Golf remains a benchmark. Pure and simple...

"It's no surprise the Golf is the third best-selling vehicle in history. What started off life as a cheap and simple German runabout in the mid-1970s has slowly become an almost premium offering in the segment - and though it's not perfect, our long-term Golf shows no signs of tiring," Mr Roebuck said.

Best Family Car over \$30,000 - Mazda 6 Wagon

Again this category was not going to be easy, especially with so many potential candidates. But after many robust discussions and a lot of data crunching, the Mazda 6 shone brightest. The Mazda 6 Sedan was the winner in this category last year.

As well as meeting - and in many cases exceeding - key safety and equipment requirements, including reversing camera, five-star safety rating and the like, the Japanese-built mid-sized car marries a sporty, elegant design with a number of family-friendly tweaks that don't go unnoticed. ISO fix anchors? Check. Rear seat vents for the climate control? Check. Decent luggage space and a great looking wagon option? Check and double check.

The Mazda 6 racked up plenty of fans among the judges for excellent ride and handling and European-luxury levels of refinement and operation. It also proves that a front-drive family car can still deliver an engaging drive – there's nowhere in the rules that says family cars have to be boring.

Advanced direct-injection petrol and diesel powertrains offer strong performance and commendable fuel efficiency – especially the latter. With plenty of boot space and room enough for five, the Mazda 6 is premium yet pragmatic vehicle.

While it may not be the newest family car on the market, with useful updates in its latest variants, it's one of the very best.

"It might not look or drive a lot differently, but more equipment and mostly lower prices make the upgraded 6 a more fitting Mazda flagship and an even more compelling offer in its class," Mr Roebuck said.

Best SUV under \$50,000 - Mazda CX-5

There's no question that the Mazda CX-5 remains a benchmark in the mid-size SUV segment. It is the best in class for refinement, packaging, performance and efficiency – and with all the recent refinements takes its lead a step or two further.

Well what else can we say about this vehicle in a category that was a close run race, but with so many pros and very few cons, Mazda's CX-5 took the title - a title it was also awarded in 2014.

An appealing design inside and out, plenty of interior space, and impressive standard features were joined by lower prices and more safety features for the CX-5 Series II update introduced early this year.

The update also made the CX-5 quieter and smoother to drive, with gains in terms of ride comfort that take nothing away from its engaging dynamics – an area few of its rivals can match.

Rock-solid resale, cost-effective servicing options and real customer appeal tick all the boxes; and when you consider many CX-5 variants are under \$40,000, the overall performance is even more impressive.

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It won last year, and unless the competition pulls one out of the box, the CX-5 will probably do so again next in 2016. There's a reason this Mazda is the top-selling SUV in Australia, because at any price, it's one of the best.

Best SUV over \$50,000 - Porsche Macan

This category winner had to be more than just a practical, high-riding and luxurious wagon. It had to be desirable and tick all of the boxes a discerning buyer expects.

The Porsche Macan does just that.

"Porsche's smallest SUV sets new standards for dynamics in its class, steering with more accuracy, braking with more force and gripping the road with more alacrity than any other SUV. The level of precision, feedback and driver involvement on offer is simply astounding," Mr Roebuck said.

In a world full of copy-cat SUVs, the Macan is a breath of fresh air. If you thought Porsche couldn't retain its sports car DNA and deliver the practicality expected in a luxury medium SUV, think again.

The fact this wagon can hustle doesn't hurt either.

The interior conveys equal parts luxury and performance and with a contemporary design that raises eyebrows. The overall effect is impressive, plus there's all the latest technology you'd expect.

In a segment that talks Lifestyle with a capital L, badges count. Porsche built its reputation building sports cars, but it pays the bills building desirable, competent and classy SUVs – and Macan is its best. Did we mention that the Macan also won in 2014!

Best Prestige Car under \$100,000 - Mercedes-Benz C-Class

With more choice for prestige and luxury car buyers than ever before, it's difficult to know where to start. But when it comes to luxury, safety and elegance, the Mercedes-Benz C-Class is difficult to overlook. It was, after all, the inaugural 2014 carsales Car of the Year overall winner.

The smooth mid-sized Merc blends class-leading safety and refined, responsive motoring and delivers excellent cabin comfort and real luxury.

This year's C-Class takes the carsales Car of the Year Best Prestige Under \$100,000 gong – again – for the very same reasons. It set a new benchmark on its release and, despite spirited competition, is yet to be bettered in its class. Plus it continues to deliver outstanding value for money.

Boasting typically impressive German build quality and packing the sort of high-tech driving aids, safety systems, convenience and luxury features that were once the reserve of \$200,000-plus vehicles, Mercedes' top-selling C-Class is, as ever, a class act.

"Driving the C 250 is a pleasure. Yes, there are all sorts of competition now ranged against it – and that just in the Benz showroom! But I reckon the C-class has a combination of style, functionality and driving enjoyment few can match – especially if you tick the right options and fine-tune the suspension. Alphabetically speaking then, I give the C an A," Mr Roebuck said.

Best Prestige Car over \$100,000 - Mercedes-Benz CLS-Class

Winning this category requires several crucial elements – road presence, opulent luxury and scads of sophistication. These are traits the Mercedes-Benz CLS-Class has in abundance – especially in its controversial Shooting Brake form.

The CLS four-door "coupe" won this category last year, but this year carsales' data points saw the CLS Shooting Brake take the cake. The wagon variant's striking design and improved versatility in part seals the deal.

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The CLS Shooting Brake delivers "extras" such as a striking cherry-wood finish to the luggage compartment floor. Complete with black inlays this is a decadent but welcome "surprise and delight" feature in this prestige car.

Fitted-out with one of the most lavish cabins available and equipped with strong standard equipment (including some very clever headlight and camera technology) the CLS-Class Shooting Brake delivers strong retained value and, thanks to turbo-diesel options, competitive running costs.

Equal parts sophistication and luxury, the CLS-Class Shooting Brake makes a winning impression – for all the right reasons.

"The addition of a five-door variant to the CLS family is a sensible move on Mercedes' part. It widens the appeal of the nameplate and delivers a more emotive product than would be possible via the E-Class alone," Mr Roebuck said.

"The only thing devaluing the new five-door CLS is its Shooting Brake name. This most sporting and surprisingly versatile of wagons deserves better than to be saddled with a moniker most Australian consumers don't know or understand."

Best Performance Vehicle under \$100,000 - Ford Fiesta ST EcoBoost

The title gives most of the game away. In addition to the price ceiling for this category, eligibility requires a power to weight ratio in excess of 120kW per tonne for hatches and the like, while roadsters get away with a little less mumbo.

But the key focus here is dynamic ability and pure driver enjoyment. A five-star ANCAP rating isn't mandatory but a thoroughly polished chassis is. Ford's Fiesta ST delivers in each category - consummately.

A giant-killer at motoring.com.au's Australia's Best Driver's Car awards, the rabid three-door is adjustable and engaging in corners, and its lightweight and turbo torque sees it far from embarrassed in a straight line.

Best of all is the Fiesta ST's price point. At well under \$30,000, it's the best value performance buy on the market.

"Ford's Fiesta ST has it all: performance, on-road grip and tactility, and the ability to be at one with the driver in a well-appointed and comfortable cabin environment. Less than \$30,000 never bought so much in a bona fide driver's car."

Best Performance Car over \$100,000 - Porsche Cayman

The 2014 winner of this category is also the 2015 winner. The category casts a wide net: everything from muscular sedans to supercars is considered fair game. But it's a mid-engine coupe that takes the title again.

Rarely is a sports car as competent as this - whether you consider the entry-level version, or shell out \$150,000-plus for Australia's best drivers' car, the Cayman GTS, you're buying access to the sweetest engine/chassis combination ever offered in Australia.

Gut-wrenching acceleration may not be the Cayman's forte, but in top-spec it's plenty quick enough. Where this car wins against all comers is its sheer ability in a range of road and track conditions – and it keeps coming back for more.

Porsche's best sports car ever? Even as dyed-in-the-wool 911 fans, we'd be happy to argue for the affirmative.

"The vehicle is tactile, communicative and eager, in the best tradition of great sports cars. The Cayman is at the same time nimble and trustworthy... fast but never, ever frenetic," says Mr Roebuck.

Best Off-Road 4x4 - Ford Ranger

There's nothing more embedded in the modern Australian psyche than the big trip – hitching up the family and heading bush. Perhaps that's why even city-slickers can't get enough of the Ford Ranger.

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Ranger is almost single-handedly keeping Ford Australia a top-10 brand in terms of sales. But that's not why we gave it our 2015 award. It's simply a great truck.

The handsome dual-cab continues the tradition of robust off-road ability established by its predecessor, but now adds a whole swag of comfort, safety and convenience items that separates it from the rest of the pick-up pack.

Indeed, this is now a vehicle that we reckon can take on – and beat – the very best off-road wagons.

Ranger has real tuff truck credentials and can conquer the worst this wide brown land can throw at it. Yet it's also up to date in terms of technology and safety – even by passenger car standards.

In a hot category with no shortage of competition, Ford's further refined Ranger stands out. It is as comfortable on a family trip to the city as it is cresting Big Red.

"Ford's 4x4 Ranger makes a very good fist of being all things to all people – or at least many things to many people. Weekday workhorse, tow tug, off-road explorer, family transport – the Ranger can be all these things," said Mr Roebuck.

Best Tradie Vehicle - Ford Ranger

The very best Tradies are down to earth, competent, all-rounders with an eye for detail. The Ford Ranger is pretty much the four-wheeled equivalent.

Ford Ranger has great sport truck credentials but it also excels in the business world. Load hauling, towing and off-roading, it's the pick of the working wheels category and, thanks to recent updates, delivers mobile office functionality of which some luxury cars would be jealous.

We considered vans, but the versatility, drivability and performance of the Ranger triumphed, so too its dollar-per-kilometre credentials, both short and long-term.

Thoroughly capable, thoroughly modern, and developed with more than an eye to Aussie conditions, Ranger offers variants to suit most working wheel applications and budgets.

Others might own the badge workmate, but it's this Ford that lives up to that promise.

"The Ranger presents as a thoroughly capable and modern vehicle with the rugged underpinnings required of an off-road load hauler," said Mr Roebuck.

Green Car of the Year - Tesla Model S

In the book written to document the evolution of the 21st century automobile, there will be a chapter reserved for Tesla's Model S. At the risk of being clichéd, this is a game-changer. It will therefore come as little surprise that the battery-powered luxury car is carsales' choice as Green Car of the Year.

Such is the reputation of the US-built Model S that a certain mythology already surrounds it – and the company that created it. But park the baggage and hyperbole, dismiss the company's at times over the top PR spin and assess the Model S as a vehicle in its own right and you can't help but be impressed.

There's only one other EV sold today that's as complete in automotive terms and that car's real world range is barely a third of the Tesla's. Nor does that 'other EV' offer the flexibility of packaging of the Model S.

Consider also the Model S' safety credentials, projected retained value and cost to run and other Redbook data sets and the value equation absolutely stacks up. No, we're not converts, but we are mighty impressed!

"If you are concerned about what the world might become without the internal combustion engine then drive the Model S. We reckon instead of worrying about the future you'll look forward to it," said Mr Roebuck.

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The judging criteria

Redbook data is a key factor in deciding carsales Car of the Year

The key point of difference between carsales Car of the Year and other awards is the combination of critical expert evaluation and purchase and ownership data.

The motoring.com.au crew supply the former but the data and number crunching is the domain of Redbook.

The very first cut for eligibility is on-sale dates. To qualify for the carsales Car of the Year awards, new cars must be available for sale to the general public via recognised OEM (manufacturer or approved importer) channels before September 1 in the year of the awards. Next, Redbook confirms eligibility on the basis of the each category's rules. These are outlined in the information on each category winner.

Then comes price. Eligibility is based on recommended retail price of the base model under consideration. After that all expert evaluation, ownership costs and affordability calculations are based on the price, packaging and equipment of the respective top-selling variants.

It's the nitty gritty of the data calculations that separates carsales Car of the Year. Expert opinion forms 70 per cent of the potential 100 point maximum score for each vehicle, with cost to run, retained value, consumer engagement and affordability comprising the rest.

Cost to run is by far the most complex calculation. This includes estimated costs for fuel, on-road costs, tyres, Insurance and finance over a three-year period averaged per month for each of the five category finalists. Once calculated, the cheapest car to run gets 10 points with points applied to the rest as a ratio of the lowest monthly cost.

Retained Value is also worth a maximum of 10 points. This is calculated as a percentage of RRP of the Redbook 'Good Retail Retained' value after 36 months (60,000km). Here points are applied as a ratio of the highest retained value.

Consumer Engagement is a measure of the popularity of the car with new car buyers and is awarded a maximum of five points. This leverages data from within the carsales network and calculates 'detailed views' of the Vehicle Model (ie: all Mazda 6s) for the July and August immediately prior to awards eligibility date. Points here are applied as a ratio of the highest views.

Affordability is a measure of the category finalists against each other based on RRP. Points applied as a ratio of the lowest RRP of the five category finalists with the lowest priced vehicle scoring a maximum of 5 points.

Cost to Run

Cost to run is calculated based on the below criteria. Costs are average per month over three years and 60,000 kilometres.

Fuel

Based on ADR combined economy. Fuel prices as at August 31, 2015 - excludes any shopper docket or other discounts. Assumed mileage is 20,000 kilometres annually for three years. Fuel RON rating/FE figures as per RedBook data.

On Road Costs

Based on initial year stamp duty plus registration for Victorian Metro. Registration charges only for years two and three. Includes Victorian hybrid/electric discount of \$100 where applicable.

Tyres

Based on 20,000 kilometres annually. Tyre costs from Tyresales.com.au (averaged, excluding the no-name Chinese brands). Turnover of tyres varies on segment, though generally assumed to get 50,000 kilometres from a set of tyres, so at least one replacement set of new tyres will be required over 60,000 kilometre/three-year period.

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Insurance

Based of online quotes from Budget Direct (via carsales.com.au) where available, or from RACV as an alternative.

Finance

Assumes 100% finance over three years at 7.00% interest rate via Stratton.com.au finance calculator.

Servicing

Uses manufacturer scheduled service costs where available, or alternatively, assumed default values for each segment, based on prior Redbook cost-to-own studies.