Hi everyone and a happy new year to you all. By the time you read this newsletter, World Car Awards’ jurors will have almost finished participating in the first round of voting for this year’s six category winners.

Just before the votes are cast, the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) has managed to grab as many headlines as Donald Trump’s disturbing twitter feed that preceded the Detroit Auto Show.

Boasting an ever-increasing focus on automotive technologies, CES revealed the latest trends in next generation artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, autonomous driving, electrification, drones, virtual reality and super-efficient lithium-air batteries.

In the CES’s keynote speech, NVIDIA CEO Jen-Hsun Huang announced an AI car supercomputer called Xavier which provides his company’s self-driving car BB8 with an AI Co-Pilot setup that generates road alerts for drivers and recognizes facial expressions and voice recognition to improve the driving experience.

We also saw established carmakers joining forces with...
electronics companies to create prototypes of next-generation self-driving cars. Those collaborations include Audi with NVIDIA and BMW siding with Intel and Mobileye. BMW says it will test 40 experimental vehicles on American and European roads this year in preparation for full deployment for average users by 2021.

At CES, other manufacturers that cemented their presence via a combination of pure electric drivetrains, AI and self-driving technologies were Faraday Future, Toyota, Nissan, Honda, Ford, Hyundai and Rinspeed.

Automation company X-Matik revealed its prototype L3 self-driving car fitted with a combination of lidar, cameras and robotics that can be retro-fitted to your existing car allowing it to self-drive, a technology that is sure to interest many.

Once World Car jurors’ online votes have been tabulated by KPMG by late January, and the top picks have been decided in each of the six categories, judges will vote a second time in the first week of February.

The six categories include World Car of the Year, World Green Car, World Performance Car, World Luxury Car, World Car Design and the newly added World Urban Car.

Inside the Bridgestone stand at the Geneva Motor Show in early March, World Car will announce the finalists in all categories before unveiling the winners at a high profile awards ceremony at the New York International Auto Show on April 13.

Again in 2017, World Car looks forward to working with established partners in Bridgestone, Autoneum, PRIME Research and Newspress as well as new partner Brembo.

World Car is more than just an awards program. It is a resource for the industry with a focus on excellence and innovation on a global scale.

Our role is not just to reward current achievement but to also provide an insight into the future via trend studies and related initiatives and to foster innovation for that future.

We look forward to seeing you all in Geneva on March 7 for our finalists’ announcement and then in New York City on April 13 when we will reveal the winners of the 2017 World Car Awards.
It all comes at once: Electrification, autonomous driving, artificial intelligence. The business is in turmoil, and the official celebration of those new technologies happens in Las Vegas.

For the 50th time, Las Vegas has experienced the former Consumer Electronics Show, an industry fair that now prefers to be called CES without disclosing the (hidden or former) meaning of this abbreviation. (We’ll try not to mention it again.) The auto industry has been part of it for several years - not only to publicly underscore how much it is in touch with the demands of customers, but also because there is no better place for the gurus of electronics to network.

BMW delivered the perfect example: At a press conference, board member Klaus Fröhlich asked Intel CEO Brian Krzanich and Mobileye-co-founder Amnon Shashua onto the stage: BMW has been working with both of them for 6 months, in order to promote autonomous driving.

Remarkably, many of the findings will be available to other carmakers. The open platforms are important for BMW: They have to give up their data, but they can potentially use user data from a vast pool of carmakers and development partners.

Suppliers are stepping on the gas, too: ZF has been working with the US-based software developer NVIDIA on artificial intelligence. The ZF ProAI system uses sensor and camera data through deep learning technology and a scalable Drive PX 2 AI computing platform. Series production is planned for 2018.

Now Bosch has begun to cooperate with NVIDIA, too. And on the stand of the Stuttgart-based supplier, there is an Edag-built concept which interprets the car as the driver’s personal assistant. For instance, it can communicate with the driver’s house or apartment - and, for example, check the contents of the refrigerator for the ingredients of a recipe, which has been recommended by an app downloaded by the car. If anything is missing, the car can direct the driver to a recommended shopping point.

BMW has equipped a small fleet of 5-series models with similar systems - in order to demonstrate the joys and advantages of autonomous driving. The driver, after all, shouldn’t get bored, and therefore the car offers not only enlightening info on its surroundings, but it also grabs info from the driver’s calendar in order to make further suggestions, invariably centered around shopping and spending money.
The concept i Inside, conceived by BMW Designworks in Los Angeles, is a lot more futuristic; it is far removed from a conventional car and supposed to showcase interior concepts for future fully autonomous cars. The team under Designworks chief Oliver Heilmer has actually fitted the concept with 22 books, two pillows and a blanket, while moss can be seen growing under the rear seats.

And the well-being of passengers is a hot topic at Daimler, too, showcased by the "Fit & Healthy" concept car that's based on a Mercedes-Maybach S-Class. The car scans its occupants' vital data and aims to provide "physical and mental relief." And as least as interesting is the beautifully designed "Vision Van" - fitted with delivery drones and powered by electricity.

Both Hyundai and Toyota showed their own ideas for autonomous cars: the Toyota concept, in particular, is extremely forward-looking. VW dragged out last year’s I.D. concept, while Audi was missing altogether - a curious absence, because the company has a proud history at CES. Last year, they were represented by Ricky Hudi, who has since opened his own company.

Perhaps the greatest highlight was the FF91 fully electric crossover by startup company Faraday Future; it will enter series production in 2018. The brand has suffered financially, and the press conference before the CES went awry when an autonomous parking presentation went exactly nowhere. But the car is worth a close look: It makes 1050 horsepower from three E-motors, and it targets the Tesla Model X directly.

It is faster, arguably more beautiful, and it features a far more forward-looking interior concept and user interface. What’s more: The company is a lot cheaper than Tesla - in case potential investors are looking.

Tesla, by the way, was missing at the CES. The Californian carmaker, which continues to profit massively from subsidies granted because of its battery-development capabilities, is scrambling to get the first units of the Model 3 out of the gate before the end of the year.

These high-powered electrics are great to keep interest in the technology, but we truly liked what we saw on the other end of the spectrum: The Bio-Hybrid concept by Schaeffler, a slim, four-wheeled cross between a bicycle and a city car, which could actually ride on bike lanes. It’s powered by a tiny electric motor, like a Pedelec, and it can reach between 15 and 30 mph, depending on the legal framework.

"In metropolitan areas of the future, we need to offer a maximum of mobility on a minimum of space," says Schaeffler’s R&D chief Peter Gutzmer. The Bio-Hybrid could be a great addition to a family’s vehicle fleet, and Schaeffler is discussing with cities like London to turn this vision into reality.

CES is a perfect meeting spot for meeting luminaries like "Tech Evangelist" Guy Kawasaki, who promoted Mercedes-Benz on the show floor, and visions of an electric and autonomous future dominate the somewhat nerdy event.

If only customers would follow along. Many of the above mentioned topics are far from established, their actual usefulness is debatable.

And that's why there are a lot of skeptics: "Utterly overrated," says the board member of a premium brand - and a Japanese carmaker we spoke with simply doesn't believe in autonomous driving and ventures: "If this topic ever catches on, the technology will be a commodity."

The signals from CES Las Vegas were mixed this year, just one and a half miles away from the city’s majestic Trump Tower.
It’s been a few years since the auto industry conspired to pull the rug from under the Detroit auto show. The premium brands preferred to focus on Los Angeles, where the weather is better and the customers are more solvent. A few premium brands pulled out, but the plot failed: Detroit remained the most important car show on the US market - and that’s a good thing, especially for the "Big Three," GM, Ford and Chrysler, who traditionally dominate here.

It is all the more surprising that this year, the attack on the Detroit auto show came from within: Ford sent out a secretive, three-hour invite to an embargoed preview in nearby Dearborn - right in the middle of the first press day, the only day left with any meaningful press conferences on the floor.

When other carmakers got wind of it, they got in touch with the show’s organizer, the DADA dealer association. Understandably so, because they had flown in droves of journalists so they wold report on the show, not another manufacturer’s off-site event.

A few hours of vitriolic emails and phone calls later, Ford gave up - and pushed the event to the second press day.

The news? A facelifted Mustang - a peripheral topic, albeit one that would have befitted the ailing show. Just like the show would have profited from the anticipated new Corvette, another no-show, or anything from Lincoln and Cadillac.

Arguably the show’s most beautiful debut was the E-Class by Mercedes-Benz, a triumph of purism with its clean, muscular shape. Together with the facelifted GLA and the GT Coupe, it underscores the company’s bullish self-confidence.

The same self-confidence is supposed to be conveyed by the Audi Q8, a vehicle that aims to signify a new design era after the unfortunate Egger era.

But the face of the 550-horsepower plug-in hybrid reminds us of the unforgettable Richard Kiel aka "Jaws" of 007 fame.
It’s saved by reminiscences of the original 1980 Quattro, and by a futuristic, new user interface that could mark a new standard in the premium segment. The new SQ5, by the way, will feature a petrol engine - even in Europe.

While Audi’s Detroit stand oozes the wish for dominance, Volkswagen’s I.D. Buzz concept is a cry for love. The beautifully styled van got everyone’s sympathetic attention, but it would need another 6 years to actually come to market. If at all, because this is the brand’s 4th attempt at resurrecting the traditional VW Bus.

Volkswagen’s I.D. Buzz concept: ‘A cry for love’

A ‘true surprise from Korea’: The Kia Stinger

Finally and after ten endless years, there is another Lexus LS - with a chiseled exterior where no line is the logical continuation of another, but with an ultra-modern, unusual, and beautiful interior. Under the hood of the LS500, there is a 3.5-litre V-6, in contrast to the LC500, which hosts a 5.0-litre V-8. Try to make sense of it, because we couldn’t.

As a true surprise from Korea, there was the unfortunately named Stinger; with rear-wheel drive and powerful engines, it aims directly at the Audi A7, the BMW 6 Series Gran Coupe, and the Mercedes-Benz CLS. Since its debut at the 2011 Frankfurt auto show as the Kia GT, it has lost quite a bit of its appeal, yet we applaud Kia’s bold move upmarket. Especially since the Koreans could have done better with their Genesis brand, which relies on the unremarkable G80 and G90 sedans.

And another company whose launch could have been more impressive is GAC, which showed its Trumpchi brand. Despite the interesting naming, they could have offered more in the styling and technology department.

BMW is showing a few cars we’ve seen before: The fantastic X2 concept, close to the upcoming series production model, and the new 5 Series, which could be a bit more bold. Mini has decided to shun the Detroit show, just like Bentley, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche and Tesla.

While Nissan unveiled the V-Motion concept car, a clear hint at the next-gen Altima, Toyota unveiled the next generation of the immensely successful Camry. Remarkably, it keeps the uplevel V-6; “green” customers may continue to opt for the four-cylinder hybrid.

Perhaps the exodus of meaningful new vehicle launches in Detroit is an appropriate precursor of this brave new world.

But true progress, we learned in Detroit, lies in autonomous driving anyway: The blessings of driverless mobility are painted in bright colours. Whether it be Chrysler, Nissan, or the German premium brands, they all tell us: Once drivers are relieved of the awesome burden of driving, happiness and harmony are around the corner.
It wasn’t too long ago that you could simply say that performance-related parameters governed buying decisions for consumers in the developed world, while cost of ownership is what really mattered to their counterparts in the developing markets. Over the past decade we have seen a major shift, with both worlds starting to converge. And the common parameter that drives buying decisions the world-over today is design. Styling on a car has always been an emotional and highly subjective topic, but now it is becoming increasingly relevant as automakers are done manufacturing ‘safe’ designs. The quirkier the better – as cars today reflect their owners’ personalities.

So what direction will design take in 2017? Since design is largely evolutionary and seldom revolutionary, expect an extension of some of the things we saw last year. Design Director for Jaguar Cars, Ian Callum says, “The eclectic mix of cars that we’ve seen over the years will continue, but with more focus now on crossovers and SUVs. This is clearly a fashion for the future, as people seek practicality with style. In terms of actual style there is a trend for more intricate and complicated surfacing.”

Cars are indeed becoming richer and almost bejewelled compared to those in the past. Former Chief of Design for the BMW Group, Chris Bangle says, “The last few years has seen a resurgence of the decorated surface to challenge the sculpted surface of exteriors. Some interesting developments along these lines seem to be spreading, such as the increased application of scripting programs for defining surfaces. These are computer algorithms that make the surfaces as they go along based on some parameters you put into them; not surfaces that are just defined by their borders, and until now have been used mainly in grilles and some textured smaller parts in the interiors. But now whole exterior and interior surfaces are being created that way.”
The road to world car takes many paths

Design is also governed by buyer preferences and very importantly – regulations for safety and the environment. And as we all know they vary by market! This means cars need to conform to a variety of legislations, they need to be lighter yet stronger, and employ greener means of manufacturing and disposal.

So the first big trend is going to see the use of more aluminium in mass-market products than ever before. Aluminium has been the preserve of the luxury until now, but larger economies of scale, more efficient manufacturing methods and a greater understanding of how to work more easily with the metal, are allowing the use of aluminium to become more democratic.

In the same breath let me say most manufacturers are also expecting increased use of high strength steel in structural elements. This is mostly due to increasingly stringent crash testing norms gradually becoming universal – but this is largely below-the-skin stuff!

Another trend is the increased used of high strength plastics – allowing for more exaggerated fenders or lighter hatch doors. Recent examples have been the updated Range Rover Evoque and Nissan Rogue. The use of these materials also allows greater freedom for designers to employ large colour breaks in the exteriors - as Bangle points out has been done of late by Peugeot.

The third clear trend that’s emerging is that of personalisation to make cars more individualistic. "Customising will be a major consideration in emerging markets in the foreseeable future. So we need to design new products keeping this requirement firmly in mind. More buyers will opt for two-tone roofs for instance. So we need to ensure the roof and body of a mass product can also be painted separately without inflating costs. This also applies to interior trim parts which are now designed to allow coloured and customised elements” says Pratap Bose, head of design at India’s Tata Motors.

For interiors, the view is largely unanimous – most of what we see in car cabins will be driven by technology and the human-machine interfacing of that technology. Callum says that there will be a huge emphasis on interaction within the car for both entertainment and communication – and so this will be the standard by which many cars will be judged over the next two or three years. That said, the need to carry on looking for new materials from the perspective of exciting the buyer as well as innovating for practical or environmental reasons will also continue this year. Callum adds, “I see a much more adventurous approach to materials and the use of them. Specifically, environmentally conscious and man-made materials, in both hard finishings and soft furnishings.”

The big news though is likely from how 3D printing could revolutionise car components, design parts and manufacturing processes in the years to come. And so one clear design trend this year we are likely to see would be how 3D printed panels and components will be used in concepts and show cars in 2017, with a view to adopting the same in manufacturing in the near future. Clearly a lot to look forward to then, and feast our eyes on!
Intentionally or otherwise, Donald J Trump has put himself on the automotive map in recent weeks. It could even be argued that between December and January he achieved more (some good, some bad) than any other individual inside or on the fringe of the motor manufacturing industry - a truly international business if ever there was one.

Even before he is inaugurated as US President on January 20th, Trump heaped so much pressure on Ford that the Michigan-based firm decided to abandon construction of its new Mexican factory, thereby ‘bringing auto worker jobs out of Mexico and back to its native USA’ where Trump and his fans believe they belong.

His power, behind the scenes productivity and provocative nature were further exposed when he cheekily hinted that non-American companies such as Toyota of Japan and BMW of Germany should also think very carefully before building new production lines in Mexico instead of the US - or perhaps face the prospect of a 35 per cent Trump tariff. He’s even suggested the USA needs to protect itself against some car factories/auto worker jobs in Canada. Clearly, this is a man who’s a fan of North American car production - as long as those cars are built in the part of North America known as the US.

But a huge problem for him and his country - and, with respect, this is something he may not yet fully appreciate - is that the US isn’t the biggest/most important car producing nation these days. Far from it. Global production figures for 2016 won’t be released until early Spring. But in 2015 Trump’s America built 4,163,679 cars, thereby allowing itself to sit behind Germany (5,707,938), Japan (7,830,722) and China (21,079,427). The tiny peninsula of South Korea (4,135,108), up and coming India (3,378,063) and the dark horse that is Mexico (1,968,054) are all chasing America - and hoping to catch and overtake it.

In turn, one of President Trump’s major goals will be for US citizens in US plants to build more and more mostly large US cars for domestic and global consumption. Selling them to Americans will be the comparatively easy bit as they often have the patriotism, appetite, disposable income, land mass and road space for such products. But in most other parts of the world, it’s a very different story.
countries at a time when population density is finally being recognised and talked about, along with other problems such as fewer and fewer miles of usable road per vehicle.

The USA has just 86 people per square mile. Comparing like with like, China has 371, Germany 596, Britain 694, Japan 870 and South Korea 1,313. And these are not the most extreme examples. There are plenty of other countries that have even greater population density issues. All this means that everyday cars in many - perhaps most - parts of the world will have to become smaller if road and parking space is to be found for them in increasingly packed towns and cities whose populations are swelling annually. After all, the clear global trend is for people to move from rural to urban areas in search of better paid jobs and more exciting social lives.

Such urban dwellers already know and accept that they must settle for smaller homes with reduced living space. And since there is - and will continue to be - fewer highway surfaces for the cars they own, lease or rent, it’s inevitable that they’ll have to opt for smaller personal mobility machines if they are to retain their status as active motorists.

Consumers in Britain have already bitten the bullet on this one. Up to the minute UK car sales figures for 2016 show that the two best-selling cars by far were short (circa 4m in length) superminis - the Ford Fiesta and Vauxhall Corsa. Other small or small-medium sized models dominated the Top 10 which was bereft of large cars. Oh, and by the way, Donald Trump should note that Chevrolet’s UK sales slumped to just four for the whole of 2016, while Chrysler’s plummeted even harder and faster to, er, zero.

I believe many other European and Asian countries will need to follow the British example as ‘too many’ people increasingly fight for ‘too little’ road and parking space, much of which is being converted into cycle lanes.

In an effort to recognise and encourage the use of appropriately-sized vehicles in England and neighbouring nations where space is at a premium, the British Government’s Department for Transport is taking a keen interest in the World Urban Car Award we’ve introduced this year. Watch this space for updates.

Among other things, JLR has admitted to me that a half width (circa 1m wide) Jag with 1+1 seating arrangement (see photo) is “possible” along with a proper Land Rover that could be about the same length, or less, of a traditional city car (around the 4m mark).

The short, impressive list of nominated models in our inaugural World Urban Car category proves that small vehicles don’t have to be cheap, nasty, undesirable and unpleasant to drive. Usually they are not. And they also happen to be among the best value for money products on the market.

Donald Trump might do well to acknowledge that while large, powerful, gas-guzzling US cars still have a role to play, that role is shrinking across the globe. In a world where urban living is the new norm and residing in rural areas is now the exception, downsizing to cleaner, more appropriately-sized, fit for purpose cars will become an unstoppable trend.

Also, there’s increasing evidence that mid-higher earning working folk will choose to save their pennies by buying or renting little ‘ecomobiles’ for their Monday - Friday urban commuting, school runs and shopping, then pop out to the beach or countryside at the weekends in their bought (or, more likely, rented) large luxury or all wheel drive ‘leisure’ vehicles. And why not?
The auto industry is in the midst of an upheaval that goes far beyond anything it has experienced in the past 100 years. Emerging industry trends such as autonomous driving, electric mobility, and connected cars are changing not only the vehicles and their technologies but their basic concepts.

It is not just the car manufacturers that must adapt quickly to these new realities. It is also their leading-edge suppliers, who play a pioneering role in new product development. That is why World Car Awards’ partner, Autoneum, headquartered in Switzerland, is establishing a Competence Center for New Mobility in Sunnyvale, California, in the heart of Silicon Valley.

From that location, Autoneum will take advantage of the proximity to other innovation leaders as it evaluates the potential of current automotive trends and how they might be implemented in new technologies and products for acoustic and thermal management, which is the company’s specialty.

In the coming weeks, Autoneum’s acoustic and heat management experts will begin developing future-oriented components and systems at the new Silicon Valley site. In doing so they will build on the company’s many years of expertise in developing and manufacturing multifunctional noise and heat protection components as they help shape the form of mobility in the future.

The lightweight construction of such components contributes significantly to lower vehicle weight, with corresponding reductions in fuel consumption and emissions. Components like these also reduce vehicle noise and thus significantly improve driving comfort, in the process making an important contribution to perceived vehicle quality.

Such attributes promise to become even more important with the advent of self-driving cars, in which comfort and optimal acoustics in the passenger cabin are likely to become major differentiators.
Examples of such components include Autoneum’s Hybrid-Acoustic inner dashes and floor insulators, made of up to 70-percent recycled fibres, which simultaneously insulate and absorb noise.

“With its Silicon Valley operation, Autoneum is taking a committed and active role in shaping mobility’s future and benefiting from knowledge transfer with other innovation leaders both inside and outside the automotive industry,” said Martin Hirzel, CEO of Autoneum.

“At our Competence Center for New Mobility we shall be developing innovative products and technologies for a wide range of vehicle concepts and forms, to provide established and new OEMs with the best possible range of acoustic and thermal management products for the cars of the future.”

The projected global increase in electric vehicles also presents new challenges and opportunities for Autoneum. Currently, the company offers corresponding development services and supplies innovative lightweight parts to both new and established providers of electric vehicles around the world.

Just like vehicles with combustion engines, electric vehicles also need components to help reduce noise – perhaps from new or hitherto masked sources such as high-frequency sounds or rolling and wind noise.

There are thermal challenges as well: Without waste heat from a combustion engine, the passenger cabin of an electric vehicle can be significantly more difficult to keep warm, placing more importance on thermal management solutions, in which Autoneum is a world leader.
BREMBO ON TRACK WITH THE FUTURE OF BRAKING

BY GERRY MALLOY, WORLD CAR AWARDS DIRECTOR AND PRESIDENT

Within many industries there are brand names so indelibly linked with the products they build that the mention of one automatically triggers thoughts of the other. Such is the case in the auto industry with Brembo, which has become synonymous with brakes.

That association has been hard-won in the crucible of auto racing where Brembo brakes are the gold standard at every level from weekend autocross to Formula One, Indycar and LeMans. Brembo’s racing heritage dates back to the brand’s selection by Ferrari for the brakes on its Formula One cars in 1975.

Since then, race cars stopped by Brembo have amassed more than 300 championships all around the world.

Victories on the track have made the name Brembo famous and the challenge of maintaining its superiority in the cauldron of the racing environment has been a major driver of its continuous innovation and development efforts.

But racing accounts for only about five-percent of the company’s business. It is braking systems for production vehicles that are its primary products.

Not surprisingly, given all the company has learned in racing, Brembo brakes are a natural choice for high-performance cars, whether they be limited production exotics or high volume mass-production variants.

It is not just their performance that has made Brembo brakes so popular. They also embody an aesthetic aspect never before associated with what were long considered purely functional components.

“If it weren’t a brake, it would be a sculpture worthy of a modern art museum,” said the international jury that awarded the Golden Compass prize, organized by the Association for Industrial Design, to Brembo’s carbon-ceramic disc braking system for street cars.
Indeed, the adoption of Brembo brakes with their brightly painted calipers, designed to complement the cars on which they’re fitted, has become a fashion statement embraced by car designers in their selection of wheels to show them off.

In a rapidly changing automotive world, Brembo is not resting on its laurels. The company, which has operations in 15 countries on three continents and markets in 70 countries worldwide, is focused firmly on the future and the vehicles it will bring.

The market is demanding increasingly tight new product development times and to meet these requirements, Brembo is committing significant resources to perfecting ever more sophisticated virtual simulation methodologies, alongside established development processes in technical centres located in Italy, North America and China.

Particular attention is focused on reducing system weight, which translates into a reduction in fuel consumption and CO2 emissions, as well as on such advanced technologies as electronic parking brakes, brake-by-wire and in-wheel electric drive systems.

That activity also includes the study of forms, materials, technologies and surface treatments able to meet the needs of the new-generation vehicles, with a particular focus on environmental impact aspects, which drives all of Brembo’s development activities.

The company was on hand at the recent North American International Auto Show in Detroit to display its latest braking technology.

World Car Awards is pleased and honoured to welcome Brembo as its latest presenting partner.
THE ROAD TO WORLD CAR TAKES MANY PATHS

HURDLES IN THE RACE FOR THE AUTONOMOUS CAR OF THE FUTURE

BY OLI NASH, HEAD OF AUTOMOTIVE NEWS AT PRIME RESEARCH

In March last year, PRIME Research’s annual World Car Trends Report identified three key areas driving media discussion of future automotive technologies: Connected Mobility, Electric Mobility and Autonomous & Shared Mobility.

While a trend in the industry towards smarter infotainment systems and so-called ‘alternative powertrains’ can clearly be seen today in vehicles entering series production, the development of autonomous technology has taken a much bumpier road to mass acceptance.

PRIME’s most recent data shows a sharp increase in media visibility for autonomous topics since the start of the decade, with CES contributing to annual ‘spikes’ in coverage each year since 2013. The Trends Report reveals that when surveyed in 2016, World Car’s expert panel of 75 jurors said that they expect fully autonomous cars to enter series production as early as 2019.

The hurdles to overcome are massive: technological complexity, slow, disorganised legislation and public reservations about safety continue to pervade discussion of the subject.

When asked to rank the most challenging aspects to autonomous driving becoming mainstream, World Car’s expert panel rated legislation as the biggest challenge in both 2015 and 2016. However, over this period, other priorities seem to have shifted significantly.

The topic of Ethics – how an autonomous vehicle should act in a ‘no win’ scenario – has grown in significance, as has the topic of investment into infrastructure.

The solutions to these challenges lie with three groups. Firstly, legislation issues and infrastructural investments have to be addressed by governments. Secondly, the responsibilities of data protection and technological standardisation lie with the manufacturers. And lastly, the question of whether consumers will be willing to trust this new technology can only be answered by the consumer.

The key is safety, according to the World Car expert panel. When the public is confident that autonomous vehicles can transport them from A to B at no risk to the occupants or other road users, then we will see widespread demand for the technology.
For now, this remains a major stumbling block. Incidents like the death of a man using a Tesla Model S in ‘Autopilot’ mode in the US (a key market for the widespread integration of the technology) in June gain more visibility in opinion-leading media than stories about continuous technological improvement and testing.

Developers of autonomous technology are under immense scrutiny from the media, which will highlight any mistakes very publicly.

However, there is evidence to suggest that journalists’ perceptions about autonomous technology are changing. The once-hated Advanced Driver Assistance feature in modern cars has turned into one of the most admired features in reviews.

Increasingly positive coverage of modern safety technology such as pre-crash systems and blind spot detection contributes to the overall image of safe autonomous technology; an image which will be crucial to its successful widespread adoption in the near-future.

PRIME Research continues to work closely with the World Car Awards to provide data-driven insight into the automotive trends of tomorrow.

The organisation will publish its annual Trends Report for 2017 on April 13th at the New York International Auto Show, which will feature up-to-date analysis of the automotive landscape, and will provide insights into the key topics driving the future of the industry.

PRIME analysts will study data from the top opinion-leading media from 25 markets around the world, as well as utilising the knowledge and experience of the World Car expert panel, to present the key trends of 2017.

As discussion surrounding autonomous driving seems only to be growing, it will be fascinating to see how perception of the technology has developed, and how media tonality has changed over the course of the year.

As always, PRIME will be monitoring the development of the technology with a close, analytical eye.
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CONTACT

wcoty.com or Beth Rhind, Executive Manager, beth@wcoty.com