

WORLD CAR AWARDS

INSIDER REPORT

FRANCE AND KOREA AMONG THE STRONGEST CONTENDERS FOR WORLD CAR GLORY IN 2020

By Mike Rutherford

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The first dozen years of the **World Car Awards** program will be remembered for a pair of vehicle-producing nations that held what seemed like an unbreakable stranglehold on the World Car of the Year title.

From 2005-2016, Germany clinched an astonishing eight WCOTY trophies, Japan an impressive four, the rest of the world none.

To be fair - and perfectly honest - back then, German and Japanese companies were generally building the best, most desirable, widest ranges of cars for global (not to be confused with local) consumption. They can, or at least could, afford to be confident and a tad arrogant because they were pretty much untouchable during their 12 year reign as undisputed WCOTY champs.

But in 2017, the tide turned. Germany and Japan stopped picking up World Car of the Year titles. First it was England that broke the winning streak thanks to its Jaguar F-PACE stealing the coveted WCOTY crown in '17. Then, in 2018, a win for the Volvo XC60 underlined the growing strength of Sweden as a premium car producer. And the following year, Jaguar grabbed its second WCOTY victory in three years with the pure-electric I-PACE.

If the provisional 2020 World Car of the Year candidates list is anything to go by (and, believe me, it is) South Korea and France are the joint statistical favourites to steal the WCOTY title at our New York International Auto Show prize-giving ceremony on April 8 next year. How come? Because, somewhat surprisingly, they share around half the nominations this time around - with a healthy seven apiece. To put this in context, Sweden has none; the UK and Japan have just two each; American firms enjoy three; and Germany boasts six which is good...but not good enough to match or beat the buoyant Koreans and French at this early but crucially important stage of the 2020 competition process.

Hyundai, Kia, DS, Peugeot, and Renault have for now secured joint pole position because they're boldly designing and manufacturing extensive line-ups of affordable, real world cars for so many real world consumers across the globe. These are the companies - Hyundai and Kia in particular - who are doing the right low, medium or high tech petrol, diesel or electric vehicles in the right sizes, at the right sort of prices for the peoples of the world, not just the folks back home. It's also good to see brands such as SEAT (Spain) and Skoda (Czech Republic) in the hunt for the WCOTY title - with highly credible products.

In the World Luxury Car class Germany bounces back and dominates with eight candidates. The Americans - thanks to Cadillac - are next with two, while the Japanese steal the remaining place.

And it gets better still for the Germans in the World Performance Car sector which is occupied by 11 of their contender models. That's impressive. The remaining pair are from France and Japan.

Worryingly for them, the likes of Jaguar, Land Rover, Lexus and Volvo are conspicuous by their absence from the Luxury and Performance lists this time around - simply because they have no all-new models that qualify.

In the World Urban Car category, it's the French who occupy an apparently commanding position thanks to Renault, Peugeot and Peugeot-owned Opel/Vauxhall. But they face extremely stiff competition from Kia of South Korea, England-based MINI, and German giant, Volkswagen. Each has a strong contender car.

It's encouraging to see several reasonably-priced pure-electric models fighting for this 2020 World Urban Car crown. These are the sort of state of the art vehicles most likely to appeal to large numbers of cost-conscious drivers who now seem ready to seriously consider buying or leasing EVs for the first time. Some bigger, more upmarket pure-electric cars have often proved themselves to be beyond the financial reach of many potential customers. This is not the case with smaller (sub-4.2m), affordable EVs currently fighting for that 2020 World Urban Car prize.

In this, plus the WCOTY, Luxury and Performance categories, our domestic and international test drives have begun and will continue for the next three months or so, prior to our first round of voting on January 27, followed by the second and final round on February 14.

The battle for 2020 World Car trophies has already commenced. May the best cars win.

***THE ROAD TO 2020 WORLD CAR AWARDS:
BEGAN IN FRANKFURT SEPTEMBER 10, 2019.
WILL END AT THE NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOW ON APRIL 8, 2020.***

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