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AWARDS : 2023

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AM, Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA
Email: AM@bauermedia.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor Tim Rose 01733 468266
tim.rose@bauermedia.co.uk • @AM_editorTimR

PRODUCTION

Head of publishing Luke Neal
Production editor Dave Buckley

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeremy Bennett, Stephen Briers, Matt de Prez,
Chris Lowndes, Tom Seymour, Tom Sharpe

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Head of project management
Leanne Patterson b2bpm@bauermedia.co.uk
Project manager
Ella Harrington

ADVERTISING

Group advertising manager
Sheryl Graham 01733 366467
Account managers
Sara Donald 01733 366474
Zaher Khan 01733 979466
Recruitment enquiries 01733 366473

EVENTS

Event director Chris Lester
Event manager Sandra Evitt 01733 468123
Event manager Kate Howard 01733 468146
Head of exhibitions Katie Gordon-Hill 01733 468289

PUBLISHING

Group editor Stephen Briers
Head of digital/associate editor Jeremy Bennett
CRM & marketing manager Lauren Annis
Managing director of Commercial,
UK Publishing Nicky Holt
Office manager Jane Hill 01733 468319
Chief financial officer Lisa Hayden
MD Automotive group Niall Clarkson
Commercial director, Automotive Gareth Ashman
CEO of Bauer Publishing UK Chris Duncan

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Hello and welcome to our special report focused on the winners of the 2023 AM Awards.

It was hard to believe a year had passed since our first awards dinner in London at the amazing Park Plaza Westminster Bridge hotel, but, yet again, hundreds of automotive retail industry people filled the space to its capacity.

It was a wonderful night of celebration – possibly the most important and prestigious event in the capital since the coronation of King Charles III. Although we couldn't quite match the bling on show or the selfies with Katy Perry!

My thanks to all who entered the AM Awards this time. The information we request is vital to enable our judges to robustly review and debate the finest submissions.

I'm grateful to all of our judges for putting in the many days it takes to ensure we select the right finalists and the most deserving winners from the many entries we receive.

Thanks also to our 2023 awards auditors, the automotive team at UHY Hacker Young, which has done an outstanding job in interviewing entrants in the major dealer group categories to glean vital additional insights and verify their claims.

Find out who won what, and why, on the pages overleaf.

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Rated Excellent

Geoff Dowding, executive director – sales & aftersales, Group Lotus (centre) collected the award from David Paterson, managing director of sponsors Supagard while the evening's host TV news presenter Charlene White looks on



NEW CAR OF THE YEAR

Winner: Lotus Emira

VOTED FOR BY READERS

Building on the legacy of the iconic Lotus Elise, the Emira represents a new era for Lotus with enhancements in practicality, comfort and technology.

It's the most accomplished Lotus road car yet, balancing a high level of driver engagement with the practicality of an everyday sports car.

The Emira has been developed on a new light-weight bonded aluminium chassis and is available with a choice of two mid-mounted petrol engines.

From launch, the Emira was offered as limited-production 'First Edition' model only, powered by

the same 3.5-litre V6 as the brand's Exige and Evora models. Developing 400PS, it's mated to a six-speed manual gearbox with a visible gear change mechanism and hydraulic power-assisted steering.

A turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine from AMG, the performance division of Mercedes-Benz, will make its way into the new Lotus sports car later this year.

Matt Windle, managing director of Lotus Cars, said: "The Emira is a game-changer for Lotus. It stands as a beacon of everything we have achieved

to date in the transformation of the business, the embodiment of our progress. It is a highly significant milestone on our path to becoming a truly global performance car brand."

The Emira's launch coincided with the brand's shift to an agency model agreement with its retailers. The changes come as part of a Vision80 strategy which has brought the introduction of the £2 million Evija hypercar, the introduction of a new retail corporate identity and the development of a new £100m manufacturing facility at its Hethel headquarters and technology centre at Warwick.

SHORTLISTED

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Ford Ranger Raptor | Nissan X-Trail |
| Kia Niro | Range Rover |
| Lotus Emira | Range Rover Sport |



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Paul Philpott, president and CEO, Kia Motors UK (centre), was presented with the trophy by Simon Cook, sales director of sponsors Car Care Plan



USED CAR OF THE YEAR

Winner: Kia Sportage

VOTED FOR
BY READERS

Now in its fifth generation, the Sportage has been instrumental in driving growth for Kia and used models retain significant desirability.

Following its win as AM's New Car of the Year, in 2022, the latest Sportage builds on the success of its predecessor with enhancements in styling, driveability and powertrains.

The Sportage resonates well with used car buyers as it has proved reliable and robust. Equipment levels are generous, with premium car features like keyless entry and heated seats featured across most models in the line-up.

Kia's famous transferable seven-year warranty means used cars less than five years old will also be covered by manufacturer warranty, another added bonus to prospective buyers.

A five-star safety rating from Euro NCAP cements the car's appeal among family buyers, too. The safety focus continues with forward collision avoidance assist, which includes sensors for monitoring pedestrians, cyclists and junctions.

Taking inspiration from the recently-launched fully-electric EV6, the new Sportage has a distinctive look and an upmarket interior.

The chassis was developed specifically for

European roads and delivers a more engaging drive, while ride comfort and refinement are raised to premium brand levels.

New powertrains introduce hybrid and plug-in hybrid (PHEV) technology for the first time, improving performance and efficiency.

The Sportage PHEV can travel more than 40 miles with zero emissions, when fully charged, and delivers an impressive 265PS, making it the most powerful Sportage to date.

As a family-focused model, the Sportage has a luggage capacity that is among the best in its class – offering almost 600 litres of space.

SHORTLISTED

Hyundai Tucson
Kia Sportage
Land Rover Defender

Nissan Qashqai
Porsche 911
Volvo XC40

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S & R Miller directors Stuart (second from right) and Rachael Miller received the award from judge Jim Saker, Professor of Retail Management, Loughborough University



INDEPENDENT WORKSHOP OF THE YEAR

Winner: S & R Miller

Further strides made by S & R Miller showed it was more than worthy of retaining the AM Awards Independent Workshop of the Year title in 2023.

The family-run business has continued to grow in considered fashion since its 2022 victory, demonstrating a keen eye on the future as it almost doubled its profits and more than trebled its parts revenue between 2020 and 2022.

Utilisation has also accelerated despite growing the Volkswagen and Audi Group aftersales specialist workshop's team of technicians from one to three in the past three years.

Having doubled the scale of its facilities with a move to a new 2,000 sq ft building 30 months ago, S & R Miller is now in the process of moving to a 3,000 sq ft facility on the same Wigan trading estate.

The past 12 months have seen the business become a Castrol service workshop, adding profile to a service underpinned by Bosch-trained technicians.

A sharpening of lead attribution monitoring has served to identify that almost 70% of its business is now derived from returning customers, with a contact strategy investigating why service or MOT reminders were not followed-up if retention was not achieved.

The creation of a service advisor's role has also underpinned S & R Miller's desire to ensure that high levels of customer service are maintained as the business grows.

Close control of workshop cleanliness was also acknowledged not only as a positive influence on visiting customers, but as a key to improved efficiency, with the organisation of tools and supplies keenly monitored to ensure they can be quickly located at all times.

In all, S & R Miller's polished performance ensured that it gained the unanimous winner's vote from the awards judges.

SHORTLISTED

In n Out Autocentres
LM Motor Clinic
S & R Miller

Patrick McGillicuddy, interim managing director, Jaguar Land Rover UK (centre) received the award from AM editor Tim Rose



HYBRID VEHICLE OF THE YEAR

Winner: Range Rover Sport PHEV

VOTED FOR
BY READERS

A significant overhaul for the third-generation Range Rover Sport has elevated not only its core attributes as a luxury SUV but also its environmental credentials.

While an all-electric Range Rover Sport will join the line-up in 2024, for now electrification comes in the form of a pair of mild-hybrid diesels, two mild-hybrid petrols and two plug-in hybrids.

As one of only a handful of hybrid cars currently on sale to achieve a zero-emission range of more than 60 miles and to provide rapid charging

capability, the plug-in hybrid Range Rover Sport plays an important role in evolving the benchmark for electrified models.

The P440e and P510e are equipped with a 31.8kWh (usable) battery, providing a zero-emission range of 71 miles and 70 miles, respectively. Both use a 3.0-litre six-cylinder petrol engine and have WLTP CO₂ emissions of 18-20g/km.

Power from both the motor and engine is directed through the car's all-wheel drive system to provide maximum traction at all time.

The 440PS P410e can accelerate from 0-60mph in

5.5 seconds, while the 510PS P510e manages it in 5.2 seconds. Rapid charging (50kW) enables the battery to reach 80% in as little as 40 minutes.

Combined with its impressive efficiency, the Range Rover Sport provides excellent on-road driveability and refinement, while remaining true to Land Rover's brand values with a high level of off-road competency.

The new model is 35% stiffer than its predecessor and is fitted with a new type of air suspension system with active anti-roll bars to reduce lean when cornering.

SHORTLISTED

Honda Civic e:HEV
Kia Niro PHEV
Mazda CX-60 PHEV

Nissan Qashqai E-Power Hybrid
Peugeot 308 PHEV
Range Rover Sport PHEV

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David Allison, head of product and planning, MG Motor UK (centre), collected the trophy from Lance Boseley, marketing director of award sponsor Diamondbrite



EV OF THE YEAR

Winner: MG4

The MG4 is one of the cheapest new electric cars currently on sale, yet its range, performance and technology compares favourably with much more expensive rivals.

Based on an all-new platform, the MG4 is the first of a new family of electric cars from MG. The rear-wheel drive hatch provides keen handling, without sacrificing passenger comfort.

Initially available with battery capacities of 51kWh or 64kWh, the MG4 EV Standard Range is capable of

218 miles on the WLTP cycle – with Long Range SE and Trophy Models capable of 281 miles and 270 miles respectively. The 64kWh battery is also capable of charging up to 135kW, meaning a charge time of only 35 minutes from 10%–80% using a 150kW DC rapid charger.

The Standard Range car develops 170PS and the Long Range model serves up 204PS. Both can sprint from rest to 62mph in less than eight seconds.

Specification levels are high, with a 10.25-inch central touchscreen and separate digital instrument

cluster display fitted as standard, along with MG Pilot driver assistant systems and a suite of connected services.

The car also comes with a seven-year/80,000-mile warranty as standard, which remains one of the longest fully-transferable warranties in its class.

The MG4 is the second highest-selling new electric car so far this year. More than 5,200 examples of the award-winning model have been delivered so far, helping to position MG as one of the UK's fastest growing electric car brands.

SHORTLISTED

Audi Q4 E-tron
Cupra Born
Kia Niro EV

MG4
Volkswagen ID.Buzz
Volvo C40 Recharge

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BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR



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Robert Forrester, CEO, Vertu Motors (second from right), was handed the trophy by Ian Simpson, director of sponsors Premia Solutions (right). *AM* editor Tim Rose is alongside Forrester



BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Robert Forrester, chief executive of Vertu Motors

Our winner has previously told us he doesn't really like his company to enter awards directly, as he'd prefer that the AM100 dealer group be nominated by others. Well, this year, he received plenty of nominations from the AM Awards panel of judges.

From day one, when it acquired Bristol Street Motors, the strategy for the company Robert Forrester founded has been clear. Vertu Motors will consolidate franchised networks and generate benefits from large scale operations, and as a group where controls, process improvements and

people development are just business as usual.

The company now represents more car brands than any other motor retailer in the UK, having swiftly grown with mainstream brands and then prestige marques.

And it has invested in ancillary businesses, such as parts e-commerce companies and leasing operations which complement its franchised dealership core and increase Vertu's technological capabilities.

Forrester plan to expand the group further. Its acquisition of 28 outlets from Helston Garages

Group last December for £117 million was evidence of its continued intent.

Forrester recently told *AM*: "Our strong balance sheet and the ongoing support from lenders, our experienced leadership team and robust systems capabilities will ensure the group continues to capitalise on the significant growth opportunities that exist in the sector."

While Forrester once stated he was "perhaps not known for being very human" due to his analytical focus, ultimately, he wants everyone to achieve their potential in the company.

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Sharon Ashcroft, HR director, TrustFord (centre), was presented with the award by Julia Muir, founder of the Automotive 30% Club (right)



INSPIRING AUTOMOTIVE WOMAN OF THE YEAR

Winner: Sharon Ashcroft, TrustFord

Sharon Ashcroft, director of human resources at AM100 dealer group TrustFord, was named the AM Awards Inspiring Automotive Woman of the Year, in association with the Automotive 30% Club.

AM editor Tim Rose has been a judge in the Automotive 30% Club's annual Inspiring Automotive Women Awards since 2021, which recognise outstanding females working in the industry in any role, from engineers and marketing experts to department leaders and board directors.

This year he was delighted to increase AM's support for this initiative by incorporating the Inspiring Automotive Woman of the Year into the AM Awards.

Over the past few years Ashcroft has led the creation of an inclusive culture where women can thrive at TrustFord, leading to outstanding results in gender pay gap reduction.

She has introduced gender balance metrics and ensured they are monitored and acted upon at board level. Additionally, she has increased the number of female apprentices and created a women's network called Leading Ladies.

She and her fellow TrustFord directors firmly agree that diversity and inclusion is something that is completely owned from the board down, and it is now absolutely in TrustFord's DNA, its values and its purpose.

Julia Muir, founder of the Automotive 30% Club, congratulated her, adding: "We are so impressed by Sharon's accomplishments and the positive impact she has had on the automotive industry."

Also a member of the board of trustees at industry charity Ben, Ashcroft is a great influence on that organisation's strategy for health and wellbeing.

In an AM interview a few years ago about TrustFord's support for apprenticeships Ashcroft said: "We can't rely on a person's passion for cars alone to attract potential talent. We need to show how the automotive industry offers fulfilling and engaging employment opportunities to passionate men and women."

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Automotive 30% Club

SHORTLISTED

Annick Jourdenais, CFO, LKQ Euro Car Parts
Clare Wright, chief people officer, Jardine Motors Group
Lesley Woolley, COO, the IMI

Melissa Cureton, apprentice vehicle technician, Renault Retail Group
Nicola Gough, module leader, Bentley Motors
Penny Weatherup, people director, Volkswagen Group UK

Sarnjit Kaur, chief people officer, Cox Automotive
Sharon Ashcroft, HR director, TrustFord
Siobhan McKenzie, regional sales development specialist, TrustFord



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Joe Gayson, head of business, Inchcape Jaguar Land Rover Norwich (centre), collected the trophy from Alec Crichton, national key account and drive programme manager at sponsors Castrol



DEALER PRINCIPAL/GENERAL MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Joe Gayson, head of business, Inchcape Jaguar Land Rover Norwich

A cultural transformation at a two-site dealership underpinned the winning entry for the Dealer Principal/General Manager (DP/GM) of the Year Award.

Less than 18 months after Joe Gayson became head of business at Inchcape Jaguar Land Rover Norwich the carmaker was holding the operation up as a global yardstick for customer satisfaction and profitability.

And it was his account of a team brought closer together, and inspired to improve as individuals by a focus on career development and progression, that won their votes.

Gayson oversaw the opening of a new Nissan dealership when aged just 22 and has continued his career progression at Inchcape, despite battling the symptoms of dyslexia. He described the condition as “a key strength”, however, adding: “I am nothing without the team around me.”

JLR Norwich underwent a complete leadership restructure which coincided with Gayson’s arrival in July 2021.

He leveraged the change to build a culture of support, developing closer ties between the dealership team and management and creating a succession plan for the leaders of tomorrow.

Nowhere was this better demonstrated than through a technician who had been planning to depart before identification of his dyslexia resulted in improved support to help him further his manufacturer training and development within the business.

Crucially, the new team ethic and drive to succeed has resulted in a trebling of pre-tax profits between 2020 and 2022 and a NPS score that doubled in 2022 alone – accelerating it above JLR’s national average.

“This movement hasn’t happened overnight or by chance,” said one manufacturer representative. “It has happened through the great teamwork Joe has put in place.”

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Tony Sciascia, managing director/dealer principal, Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi
Paul Darch, head of business, Inchcape Mercedes-Benz Liverpool

SHORTLISTED

Tony Sciascia, managing director/dealer principal, Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi

Joe Gayson, head of business, Inchcape Jaguar Land Rover Norwich
Paul Darch, head of business, Inchcape Mercedes-Benz Liverpool

Simon Priest, head of business, Inchcape Porsche Portsmouth
John Stubbs, head of business, Inchcape Toyota Basingstoke

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John O'Hanlon, CEO, Waylands Automotive (centre) was handed the trophy by Paul Bromage, client support director at sponsors Warranty Administration Services



DEALER GROUP OF THE YEAR (UP TO 10 SITES)

Winner: Waylands Automotive

Waylands has continued its best-in-class performance to secure the Dealer Group of the Year (up to 10 sites) award for the fifth year in a row.

With Waylands' continued focus on steadily growing the business, this might be the final year the company will be competing in the up to 10 sites category.

The group expanded once again in 2022 with the addition of premium electric brand Polestar, with Waylands chosen as one of the few partners to operate a new retail space at Cribbs Causeway, Bristol. This is in addition to Kia and MG joining as franchises in 2021, alongside Waylands' established Volvo sites that sit at the heart of the business.

Waylands has continued to grow in 2022, with group turnover up 35.1%, profit before tax up by 15%, new retail volume growth up 33%, used retail

volumes up 22.5% and service hours up 31.6% year-on-year in 2022.

Waylands sums up its approach to business as "large enough to invest, small enough to care".

Led by John O'Hanlon, former Ridgeway chief executive, Waylands is backed by large dealer group expertise in terms of controls and processes, but there is a genuine focus on family, respect and values of the kind expected from a smaller business.

Increasing the number of women in leadership roles has been a key focus, with 36% women managers across the company.

Waylands continues to sponsor and champion local events for drawing in more diverse talent to the sector and works with local colleges for apprentice attraction. This has been particularly successful in establishing Waylands' new Digital Experience Team

(DET), another key objective for 2022. The DET has been tasked with delivering a true omnichannel approach and showroom level of service for digital customers. This new team has led to a 120% improvement to sales lead capture compared with the previous external chat provider.

Waylands grows its own and there were 12 internal promotions last year, with 90% of management positions filled via promotion.

Waylands has also launched its academy with new induction and training programmes, as well as establishing apprenticeship schemes for digital and sales positions, on top of traditional courses.

These initiatives have contributed to Waylands' position as one of the best dealer groups to work at in the UK with a 98% staff satisfaction rating from its internal bi-annual survey.

SHORTLISTED

Chapelhouse Motor Co
FDW Car Supermarket
Gravells
Green 4 Motor Company

Hatfields
Porsche Retail Group
Shelbourne Motors
Waylands Automotive

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Stuart Mustoe, CEO, TrustFord (centre) collected the award from John Veichmanis, chief operating officer of sponsors Carwow

DEALER GROUP OF THE YEAR (MORE THAN 10 SITES)

Winner: TrustFord

TrustFord impressed the judges this year with its dedication to innovation, a laser focus on measurement, communication and continually investing in its colleagues across the 60-site group.

A 136% increase in its rental business and a 47% improvement in new car trading profit have been among the biggest highlights for the group over the past 12 months.

TrustFord has continued to invest and innovate across the business after identifying gaps in its recruitment, customer experience, systems, servicing and fleet operations strategy.

Core to the company's brand proposition is that "people buy from people" and the business was listed as part of the Best Workplaces for Wellbeing by Great Place to Work UK in February 2023.

The company has worked to improve TrustFord's approach to diversity and inclusion (D&I) in taking a 'lead by example' approach.

Instead of appointing an individual to drive forward positive changes in the business on D&I, all board and leadership members take an active role including a new "Driving Inclusion" training programme with more than 70 sessions held so far.

TrustFord also launched its Driving4Leadership development programme in 2022 to develop 20 managers to each take the next step up as senior leaders across the business.

Another major initiative has been creating a separate Mobile Service Van operation with six hubs, increasing its fleet of vans from 60 to 112, the team growing from 98 to 198 and sales stepping up by 52% to deliver millions of pounds in new business in

2022. These mobile vans have helped to deliver best-in-class service levels to TrustFord's fleet customers, while also freeing up ramps to increase retail after-sales throughput.

TrustFord has also introduced robotic process automation (RPA) that incorporates 200-plus active bots using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning that can complete tasks such as MOT database checks, bots that check for manufacturer recall information and a supplier invoice bot that can improve payment processes.

AM's judges found that TrustFord's focus on strong, effective leadership and investment in its future success is combined with a true passion to embrace how the industry is changing.

This has created a business that is motivated to keep driving the standard in customer care.

SHORTLISTED

Arnold Clark Automobiles
Brayleys Cars
Drive Motor Retail

Lookers
RRG Group
Rygor Commercials
TrustFord

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Paul Philpott, president and CEO of Kia Motors UK (centre), collected the award from Peter McDonald, mobility director of sponsors Ohme Operations UK



MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Kia UK

Kia UK has scooped the Manufacturer of the Year trophy for the second year running having hit its long-held 100,000 registrations target in 2022.

The Korean brand drove its volumes up 10.3%, to 100,191 units, last year and expects to build on the strong performance with a further 5% uplift in 2023.

Consistent leadership and stable franchised relationships have been central to Kia's "progressive and sustainable" growth in the UK, along with a raft of exciting model launches.

Last year brought the first full year of sales for the

zero-emissions EV6 and the launch of new Sportage SUV and the Niro alternative fuel vehicle (AFV) range to Kia showrooms.

Retailers embarking on a new corporate identity (CI) update achieved an average return on sales of 2.4% and are set to benefit from greater throughput and higher margin sales in the coming years, according to Kia UK president and chief executive Paul Philpott.

Kia toppled premium Japanese brand Lexus' seven-survey stint at the top of the National Franchised Dealers Association (NFDA) Dealer

Attitude Survey Winter 2022/2023. It scored 9.3-out-of-10 in the bi-annual survey's crucial 'how would you rate your manufacturer overall?' question.

The brand also amplified the voice of its customers and ramped-up online interactions as part of a focus on brand reputation that delivered a 14-fold increase in engagement for its retailers.

Globally, Kia will introduce 14 EV models by 2027 as part of its 'Plan S' strategy. Nine of these models will make their way to the UK market.

The next model to launch will be the seven-seat EV9 luxury SUV.

SHORTLISTED

BMW (UK)
Cupra UK
Hyundai Motor UK
Kia UK

Mazda UK
MG Motor UK
Suzuki UK
Toyota GB

Sponsored by



Steven Eagell, CEO of Steven Eagell Group (centre), picked up the trophy from David Kendrick, chief executive of AM Awards auditor UHY Hacker Young



STRATEGIC SUCCESS AWARD

Winner: Steven Eagell, chief executive, Steven Eagell Group

This award enables AM and our awards audit partner UHY Hacker Young to give special recognition for the long-term strategic leadership of a motor retail business.

In the two decades since his business launched at Milton Keynes, our winner, Steven Eagell, has built extremely close manufacturer relationships and has taken selected acquisition opportunities as they came to expand into a significant partnership with Toyota and Lexus.

The outcome is a top-25 AM100 motor retailer by turnover, and one which is among the best

performers for return on sales and profit per staff member.

And its portfolio of franchised dealerships, still exclusively representing Toyota and Lexus, now spans from King's Lynn and Ipswich in East Anglia to Wolverhampton and Birmingham in the west Midlands.

A culture of competition, positivity and personal development underpins Eagell's business, which expects its teams to be curious and to find even tiny improvements in its processes. Such traits are shared by Eagell and his senior leadership team, which has honed the company's processes to

optimise customer retention and to ensure a strong balance of profit comes from new, used and after-sales, and which is also looking at non-franchised operations such as accident repair.

Diversity and inclusivity are at the core of Steven Eagell Group's people strategy, and Eagell is a member of the Automotive 30% Club, which aims to achieve industry gender balance and fill 30% of leadership positions with diverse women by 2020.

Eagell told AM in 2022 how his role is to ensure the group recruits "better than me" so it has the ability to succeed, and he has great regard for his people "on the ground, that run the businesses".

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Stuart Mustoe, CEO, TrustFord (centre), received the award from Adrian Moores, CEO of sponsors Indra Renewable Technologies



RETAILER OF THE YEAR

Winner: TrustFord

The 2023 AM Awards Retailer of the Year winner is TrustFord, the world's largest Ford dealer group, with 65 locations across the UK.

Selected from the winners of the the two Dealer Group of the Year categories, AM's judges found TrustFord's dedication to innovation and robust internal processes as some of the defining reasons why it was deserving of this headline award in the face of tough competition.

The business represents one of the highest volume car manufacturers in the UK that is transforming into an electric and commercial vehicle

specialist. With this in mind, the judges found the team at TrustFord truly willing to embrace change and to be eager to innovate and match rapidly evolving customer expectations.

The group is continuously looking to challenge how it does business and to address areas that could hold it back from delivering on the highest levels of customer and employee care.

This includes ongoing investment and innovation in areas such as recruitment, customer experience, systems, servicing, parts and fleet.

The entire car industry has faced difficult challenges over the past few years and 2022 was no

exception with severe disruption to vehicle and parts supply.

TrustFord turned these trials into opportunities with an impressive 47% increase in new car trading profit and a 17% increase in parts profit, driven by its 15 Parts Plus sites nationally.

The businesses retail operations were underpinned by a combination live video appointments, click and collect and home delivery offering as part of its joined up omnichannel offering.

All of the above was achieved while increasing its net promoter score for sales to 90% in 2022, compared with 88% in 2021.

SHORTLISTED (WINNERS OF THE TWO DEALER GROUP OF THE YEAR AWARDS)

TrustFord
Waylands Automotive

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Together, we do more



Automotive retail is changing faster than ever before.

One thing that will never change is our commitment to giving more power to you.

Because...together, we do more.

Tony Sciascia, managing director (second from right) and Dominic Castle, sales director (second from left), both of Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi, received the trophy from Darren Moon, sales director, AutoTrader



FRANCHISED DEALERSHIP OF THE YEAR

Winner: Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi

In a competitive category, it was a tale of transformation from Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi that helped it secure the Franchised Dealership of the Year award.

A business restructure to offer greater profitability from used cars and a platform which would ensure that the future retailing of new vehicles would “complement the business and not overpower it”, after an over-reliance on its former Mitsubishi franchise, was at the heart of its entry.

The subject of an management buy-out by managing director Tony Sciascia in the summer of

2021, family-run Celtic has since become one of Subaru’s top performing retailers.

A drive to create its own brand and sharpen its used car operations have led to the creation of a new website, which places a ‘celtic direct’ branding at its heart.

A renewed focus on customer service, leveraged by a celebration of handovers and QR codes to attract positive reviews and feedback have helped the business grow its profile.

Sharpened used car processes with a tightening of the appraisal processes and a shift towards pick-ups

and 4x4s has also helped the business to more than treble its profit per unit between 2019 and 2022.

While Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi’s turnover has declined by 25% between 2020 and 2022, therefore, its pre-tax profits have grown by almost 40%.

Now Sciascia is targeting a larger used car forecourt and eyeing growth with new car brand entrants to the UK market.

“I liken ourselves to a speedboat, able to easily manoeuvre, quickly change direction and adapt to the conditions,” he told AM in his award-winning entry.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Hatfields Jaguar Liverpool

SHORTLISTED

Arbury Motor Group, Škoda Leamington Spa
Brayleys Cars, Kia Enfield
Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi

Hatfields, Jaguar Liverpool
Jardine Motors, Jaguar Land
Rover Wolverhampton

Lookers, Ford Leeds
Porsche Retail Group, Porsche Centre Mayfair
Waylands, Volvo Oxford

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Let's drive... dealer innovation

We're pleased to have the opportunity to sponsor the Independent Dealer of the Year category at the 2023 AM Awards.

Startline provides motor finance to around 70% of the UK's top 50 independent car retailers by turnover – alongside around half of the top 50 franchise dealers – and we are continually impressed by their levels of innovation, agility and commitment.

Playing a part in recognising these achievements is a privilege for our business and we'd like to extend our best wishes and sincere respect to all of those shortlisted for the awards.

AM
AWARDS: 2023

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startlinemotorfinance.com

startline >

Ben Mills, digital marketing specialist (second from left) and Jade Walton, group marketing manager (second from right), were joined by colleagues Lias Gray, sales manager, and Katie Durry, marketing assistant, all from FOW Car Supermarket, to collect the award from Kelly Ventham, head of client relationships at sponsors Startline Motor Finance (right)



INDEPENDENT DEALER OF THE YEAR

Winner: FOW Car Supermarket

The breadth of transformation undertaken by FOW Car Supermarket during 2022 resulted in a winning entry.

Judges were struck by a business which invested heavily to future-proof its operations and drive the skills of staff during 2022.

The opening of a new nine-ramp workshop featuring a solar array large enough to power the business and its expanded line-up of electric vehicle (EV) charge points pushed forward the car supermarket's bid to achieve net zero.

On top of this, a focus on training and staff benefits,

and a new initiative of job rotation where possible, have served to broaden staff knowledge, opportunities and morale.

Digital developments have laid at the heart of FOW's most recent customer-facing evolution, however.

A new mobile-optimised website, backed by bespoke CMS and CRM systems, was also central to a strategy which marked out FOW as a worthy winner in a busy year for the business.

Its new website facilitated the launch of an online deal builder, which accounted for 14% of sales in

2022, while the faster platform also worked hand-in-hand with its 'new sell my car' stock sourcing initiative to grow private car acquisitions by 60%, with online valuations soaring 245%.

Aligning with the new digital platform was the addition of a team of three new staff members recruited to bring content creation in-house.

Content across TikTok and YouTube helped accelerate the car supermarket's audience of 25-to-34-year-olds by 21% and 18-to-24-year-olds by 13%.

After a year of heavy investment, FOW looks well placed to prosper.

SHORTLISTED

Baytree Cars
FOW Car Supermarket
Hilton Garage

LM Motor Company
MB Motors

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of this audience do not shop on competitor listings sites.⁴

DID YOU KNOW...

CarGurus and PistonHeads are growing faster than the industry average, which is declining.⁵

¹CarGurus UK Buyer Insight Report, March 2022. ²SimilarWeb, Total Site Traffic, Custom-defined list includes: CarGurus.co.uk, PistonHeads.com, Motors.co.uk, AutoTrader.co.uk, HeyCar.co.uk, Cinch.co.uk, Ebay.co.uk/b/cars, GumTree.com/cars, Q1 2022 to Q3 2022, UK). ³SimilarWeb, Total Site Traffic, Q3 2022, UK. ⁴SimilarWeb, Total Unique Monthly Visitors, Custom-defined list includes: CarGurus.co.uk, PistonHeads.com, Motors.co.uk, AutoTrader.co.uk, HeyCar.co.uk, Q3 2022, UK. ⁵SimilarWeb, Total Unique Visits, Custom-defined list includes: CarGurus.co.uk, PistonHeads.com, Motors.co.uk, AutoTrader.co.uk, HeyCar.co.uk, GumTree.com/cars, Q2 2022 Vs Q3 2022, UK

Grant McDowell, group brand marketing manager, and Natalina Sutherland, senior brand marketing manager (second left), both from Lookers, picked up the award from Amanda Symonds, managing director of sponsors CarGurus and PistonHeads (right)



MARKETING STRATEGY OF THE YEAR

Winner: Lookers

Lookers is on a new and exciting journey for growth, and in 2022 it launched its first major multi-channel brand marketing campaign in more than five years.

A comprehensive approach, impactful creatives, great execution and detailed analysis ensured the message 'A Good Deal. Better' delivered for this winning business, generating a notable rise in enquiries and sales from its targeted audience, including an increasing number of female buyers.

Putting the focus on choice was a key ambition for Lookers. The AM100 motor retailer recognises that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for car buyers

and that during the height of the pandemic some consumers had missed the service and relationships they had enjoyed for many years. Choice, trust and value still matter most.

Lookers' brand campaign focused on customers, their needs and preferences – presenting the easy options available to customers and assuring them they would be seamlessly accommodated their way.

Powered by a compelling 'always on' creative proposition, rich content and marketing engagement, Lookers developed a big impact customer-centric campaign designed to drive brand awareness, recognition and retention.

Rolling out nationwide in May 2022 across TV, radio, print, online, social media and outdoor, in addition to new signage at several dealerships nationwide, the integrated campaign reflected Lookers' commitment to its staff, growth, innovation and confidence in the future.

Powered by a carefully executed integrated media and digital strategy, Lookers' 'A Good Deal. Better' campaign was a major marketing and collaborative success, exceeding targets and expectations while supporting sales and new corporate growth and bucking the industry trend in a cost-of-living crisis.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Barretts

SHORTLISTED

Barretts
eStar Truck & Van
FOW Car Supermarket

Holdcroft Motor Group
Lookers
TrustFord

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We've been writing our own history for two decades, whilst at the same time helping to shape the success and profitability of our partner dealers and OEMs across the world. As we enter our 20th year our founding principles remain unchanged, whereby every individual idea and innovation exists to drive the sustainable growth of our clients and partners.

To find out more about GardX Group please visit www.gardxgroup.com



Daksh Gupta (second from left) collected the award from Victor Coutin, chairman of award sponsor GardX Group (second from right) and AM group editor Stephen Briers



AM HALL OF FAME

Inductee: Daksh Gupta, Ben trustee and former chief executive of Marshall Motor Group

Few people, in recent years, have used their business leader profile and their boundless energy to enhance the image of the UK's franchised dealers like our inductee has.

Through numerous media interviews and public presentations Daksh Gupta has demonstrated that franchised dealer groups can be great workplaces for everyone, no matter what their gender, race, religion and background.

And he has illustrated that individual ambition can be unconstrained. Hard work, a continual desire for improvement, great people skills, strong relationships and clear vision for the right opportunities can

ensure that an individual can climb high in the motor retail industry.

He has also shown that the right leadership team and the right corporate culture can attract the levels of investment that transformed Marshall Motor Group for its staff and its stakeholders.

Meanwhile, at industry charity Ben, where he is a member of the board of trustees, he led its fund-raising by example by parachuting out of an aircraft in 2016 to raise £142,000 for use in helping current and past automotive workers in need.

And he has shown on his social media channels that even people who rise up the ranks to lead thousands of employees can still, crucially, find some

time for both their family and their favourite football team. One must wonder when he ever sleeps!

Many people now ponder what the next chapter will be in Daksh Gupta's career since leaving Marshall after its acquisition by Constellation Automotive Group. We'll hear soon, we're sure.

Previous inductees: 2022 Stuart Foulds, TrustFord; 2021 Professor Richard Parry-Jones CBE (post-humous); 2020 Graham Day, CEM Day; 2019 Tony Whitehorn, Hyundai; 2018 Jack Tordoff MBE, JCT600; 2017 Michael Smyth, Swansway Group; 2016 Mark Squires, Benfield Motor Group/NFDA; 2015 Gerard Nieuwenhuys, Sytner.

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Paul Brayley, managing director, Brayleys Cars (centre) collected the award from Andrew Landell, managing director of sponsors LTK Consultants



BEST IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Winner: Brayleys Cars

Brayleys operates on the principal to “treat every visitor as a welcome guest in our home, every day, every time, without fail, no exceptions.”

More recently, the business has broken away from the historic use of the customer satisfaction index (CSI) and evolved into one that reacts almost instantaneously to customer sentiment gathered from a huge amount of data.

It found that conventional surveys and CSI questionnaires were too limited in scope, as they only allowed customers to respond to questions asked.

In 2020, Brayleys partnered with independent brand monitoring specialist Reputation as a means of collating real customer feedback, through unsolicited online reviews and social media channels.

Making use of ‘big data’ through a combination of artificial intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools, Brayleys has been able to gain insights into the huge number of online reviews and social media comments its customers are making.

By listening to what its customers are saying, the

retailer’s customer service strategy has evolved to become far more informed and has enabled it to make business decisions based on large amounts of data and feedback.

In its award entry, the company said: “We believe that simply buying customers to achieve great service is not a long-term sustainable strategy.

“By being flexible and embracing change over the 20 years that Brayleys has been trading our business has continued to deliver outstanding levels of customer service and to reflect their changing needs and communication channels.”

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Graypaul Birmingham
– Sytner Group

SHORTLISTED

Brayleys Cars
Chapelhouse Motor Co
FOW Car Supermarket
Graypaul Birmingham – Sytner Group

Hatfields
Roadside (Garages)
Roadworthy Bristol
Waylands Volvo Reading

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Assurant is passionate about fostering a diverse, equitable and inclusive culture to drive sustainable innovation for the benefit of all we support. We are therefore proud to sponsor the AM Awards Leader in Diversity & Inclusion category for a second year.

Sharon Ashcroft, HR director, TrustFord (centre), collected the award from Sadia Azam, business development director of sponsors Assurant (right)



LEADER IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Winner: TrustFord

TrustFord pledges to treat everyone the same way regardless of ethnicity, culture or any other protected characteristic. It promotes dignity and respect for all by training managers and employees about their rights and responsibilities.

These aren't empty promises.

TrustFord measures all aspects of its policy to ensure it is being adhered to.

This includes embedding key metrics into its monthly board and leadership pack, and its certifica-

tion this year by Great Places To Work as a Best Workplace for Wellbeing, which is based on anonymous employee feedback. It also holds the Good Corporation Standard.

TrustFord's commitment to D&I is unequivocal. The company says: "We have zero tolerance for anyone not aligning to our D&I commitments."

Among the expansive range of initiatives are Driving Inclusion training, redacting sensitive information from job applications to eliminate unconscious bias, chat groups, mentoring

programmes, flexible and hybrid working and a confidential and anonymous speak-up policy.

The group also reports on gender and ethnicity by location, team and group level, matching its insight to Office of National Statistics (ONS) data, while exit interviews and stay chats are business as usual.

As well as being the right thing to do culturally, TrustFord's D&I policy can also be linked to measurable business benefits, including a reduction in sickness days, fewer leavers and improved ranking on job review sites.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Norton Way Motors
Sytner Group

SHORTLISTED

Brayleys Cars
Norton Way Motors

Sytner Group
TrustFord

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ADVERTISING FEATURE

Much to consider as Consumer Duty progresses

By **Tim Smith, head of Black Horse Distribution**



At time of writing we have just passed the first deadline for implementation of the new Consumer Duty.

And I'm sure you will have now had time to read, digest and understand the Fair Value statements, that will have arrived in your in trays from your motor

finance providers.

The aim is to set a higher standard of consumer protection across retail financial markets by putting customers at the heart of all decision-making processes.

All firms have had to review their processes to ensure that customers receive good outcomes from the products and services they offer and their price and value.

The Consumer Duty also puts a greater emphasis on testing and monitoring of products, communications and services.

Price and value are, of course, a constant judgment call for dealers as they position their cars and offers to meet the rightfully high expectations of customers.

And never more so than in recent years, with the internet making access to information on all aspects of buying a car available in a click.

Now add into this the current market challenges of gradually improving supply and slightly weaker demand, the transition to electric vehicles and rising interest rates.

There is a lot to think about.

But careful consideration of these factors and ever-improving industry standards for motor finance under Consumer Duty build a positive trajectory.

As we work together to embed the Duty into our businesses, the clear goal of attracting customers to the market with compelling propositions remains.

blackhorse 

TrustFord CEO Stuart Mustoe (centre), picked up the award from Steve Young, managing director, International Car Distribution Programme, and AM Awards judge



THE COMMUNITY HERO AWARD

Winner: TrustFord

As a car retail group that attests to placing 'care' at the centre of everything it does, TrustFord's AM Awards entry proved that it acts on a desire to become part of the communities its dealerships serve.

Its entry told judges: "We are more than just a business, we have a human heartbeat too".

It added: "As a trusted brand, we believe that we have a duty of care in our local communities and want to give back where we can."

An ardent supporter of the Ben automotive

charity, TrustFord raised a total of £118,565 in 2022.

While its driving challenge, Breakout for Ben, now demands employees run, cycle, walk and swim as far as they can over a 10-day period, other staff members took part in the gruelling Beast of Ben endurance challenge.

As well as a Bake Off for Ben, the group also launched a Ben's Big Breakfast fund-raiser and contributed to the cause through payroll donations.

TrustFord's colleagues are also given a paid day off to volunteer for a cause of their choice and dealership sites are encouraged to use some of their

local marketing budget to support good causes.

At Edgware, staff succeeded in filling 780 shoeboxes with toys, school supplies and gifts for children in poverty to support Samaritan's Purse.

TrustFord's 'Fill Your Boots' campaign saw staff donate non-perishable items to foodbanks across the UK, meanwhile.

In October 2022, staff from TrustFord's head office accounts team volunteered at Colchester's Helena Hospice for the day.

Overall, TrustFord's breadth of community-focused action is a credit to its business.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

FOW Car Supermarket

SHORTLISTED

eStar Truck & Van
FOW Car Supermarket
Graypaul Birmingham – Sytner Group

Motorfinity Group
Peter Cooper Motor Group
TrustFord





Co-founders Nick Golding (centre), Ingram Sanders (second from right), and head of production Nick Salt (second from left), all from AutoComms Solutions, collected the award from Paul Jordan, head of sponsors SecretService (right)



BEST NEW PRODUCT OR SERVICE

Winner: AutoComms Solutions – AutoBuzz

AutoBuzz is an automated communications platform that helps to identify upsell opportunities that may present themselves in the order-to-handover 'gap' that exists in the buying journey.

With longer than expected new car lead times, many dealers fail to stay connected with customers for months.

This is costing dealers and carmakers in a number of ways, including missed upsell opportunities, poor satisfaction scores and deals failing to complete.

Via integration with a dealer management system (DMS), AutoBuzz is able to recognise when a new

order is created and, in real-time, curate a personalised website or WelcomeHub with details including car purchased, name of customer, location of order and details of handover day.

This highly personalised content is then delivered to the customer throughout their wait between order and handover.

In developing the system, AutoComms Solutions identified that the buying journey was "disjointed and broken". It found that customers are often given first class treatment when they enter a showroom, but then the upsell of products and services was poor at the point of order, with sales teams cramming into

conversations things like accessories, service plans and paint protection.

The problem was one of responsibility. The moment the customer places an order and parts with cash the sales executive is incentivised to head back to the showroom door and push the next customer to point of order.

Customer satisfaction scorecards, therefore, regularly include information on poor communication between order and handover.

AutoBuzz takes responsibility for the customer while they wait for their car in an automated and transparent way.

SHORTLISTED

Armchair Marketing
AutoComms Solutions
Autofinity
carwow

Castrol
Cocoon Pay
iVendi
Keyloop

Loopit
Marque Group Solutions

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Carol Fairchild, chief customer officer, CitNOW Group (centre), picked up the award from chairman of the judges Christopher Macgowan OBE



SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

Winner: CitNOW

VOTED FOR BY READERS

In the past 12 months CitNOW placed a strong focus on updating and enhancing its products, providing retailers with the latest digital technologies to help them improve the customer journey.

The company integrated its CitNOW Sales system with Dealerweb Showroom and CitNOW Web with Dealerweb React, enabling retailers to streamline the management of customer data, enhance the customer journey and improve conversion rates.

These and other initiatives helped it secure the reader-voted Supplier of the Year trophy for the fourth consecutive year. The company's suite of

digital communication and personalised video services have become a vital sales tool to 90% of the AM100 top dealer groups across the UK.

CitNOW worked closely with retailer customers to help them embrace digital communications more effectively. It now provides an extensive onboarding programme, where each customer is assigned a designated member of the onboarding team to ensure a smooth set-up.

To help retailers adapt more easily to changing consumer behaviours, CitNOW rolled out free software upgrades in 2022. Its next-generation apps offer a more streamlined experience across

CitNOW Sales, Workshop, Web and Bodyshop.

CitNOW received high praise from AM's reader voters, with one saying: "CitNOW has been an integral part of our marketing strategy over recent years, enabling our teams to connect with customers, nurture relationships and build trust through authentic sales and workshop video content.

"We receive fantastic reviews and commentary from customers about the videos we share with them, as the platform enables us to provide a more personalised and seamless online and offline experience at every stage of their journey."

SHORTLISTED

Aston Barclay
Automotive Compliance
Car Care Plan
carwow

CitNOW
Dealer Auction
DealerWeb
EMaC

Keyloop
Motorway

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John Clark, chief commercial officer, Arnold Clark Automobiles (centre), received the award from Andy Green, director of marketing and innovation at sponsors Santander Consumer Finance



USED CAR DEALER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Arnold Clark Automobiles

For the past three years nearly 98% of Arnold Clark's used car customers said they would buy from the Scottish dealer group again.

The drive to provide the best customer experience in searching and selecting from the dealer group's average 25,000 unit stock means monitoring a range of review platforms, including Trustpilot (120,000 customer reviews, with a 93% 'great' rating), Reputation and, with a focus on employee satisfaction, Indeed and Glassdoor, to identify excellence and areas for improvement.

With the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars coming in 2030, Arnold Clark has set out to be a frontrunner in the transition to electric vehicles (EVs).

It has the largest used electric stock in the UK – more than 1,000 vehicles – with more than 500 staff trained on supporting customers on their transition. The company is working on every dealership to become EV approved.

Arnold Clark is also in partnership with Bumblebee to provide customers with home charging. The group has announced it will invest £23 million in 500 ultra-rapid chargers at 100 UK sites.

With the aim of offering the leading digital environment for car search and selection, the business has digitised many physical processes – the number of signatures needed has reduced from 17 to three.

Last year, in an industry first, Arnold Clark enabled customers to retrieve their motor finance settlement figures online.

In the past year its mobile app has been improved to allow customers to book a service and MOT. The app has been downloaded 680,000 times. A new offer, exclusive to its users, gives five customers the chance to win the cost of their car, up to £30,000.

SHORTLISTED

Arnold Clark Automobiles
Celtic Subaru and Mitsubishi
FOW Car Supermarket

Hilton Garage
MB Motors
Redgate Lodge

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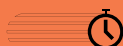


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James Clark, aftersales manager, Inchcape Porsche Portsmouth (centre), picked up the award from Jack Allman, chief commercial officer and co-founder of sponsors Bumper



FRANCHISED WORKSHOP OF THE YEAR

Winner: Inchcape Porsche Portsmouth

Inchcape Porsche Portsmouth's aftersales operation rose to the top of the Franchised Workshop of the Year category for 2023.

A standout performer for the German performance car brand, the dealership finished first in the annual Porsche Aftersales World Challenge in 2022 and recorded a CSI score of 9.9-out-of-10, placing it first from a customer satisfaction point-of-view at the time of entry.

Porsche Portsmouth has also doubled its profitability between 2020 and 2022, with a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) underlining its efforts

to achieve success by combining strong customer service with operational efficiency.

Special vehicle health check mornings at which customers are offered coffee and breakfast are one innovative initiative, with an 80% conversion of red work resulting in impressive incremental profits.

Among those attending are members of the Porsche Car Club, Tipec Car Club and the Southcoast Classic Car Club, which have forged a strong relationship with the dealership.

Furthermore, the dealership's team of technicians is motivated to deliver.

The business has experienced a staff turnover of

less than 10% over the past three years among its nine-member workforce, with the team delivering 109% efficiency to finish 2022 as the Porsche network's number one franchisee for hours sold per technician ramp.

With a dedicated booking clerk and marketing co-ordinator working daily to ensure that customers receive all the aftersales prompts and offers in a timely fashion, the business has leveraged process to excel.

And 2023 looks set to see its results further strengthened with the addition of another three workshop bays.

SHORTLISTED

Inchcape UK – Porsche Portsmouth
Inchcape UK – Volkswagen Exeter
Jardine Motors – Jaguar Land Rover Wolverhampton

Porsche Retail Group – Porsche Centre Reading
Sytner – Harold Wood

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Attract New Aftersales Customers

Take Market Share of **Profitable** 4yr +
Retail Customers:

- S** **80%+** of bookings are conquest
- S** **90%+** plus of bookings are year 3+ vehicles
- S** **400%+** minimum revenue return guaranteed
- S** **9 million +** drivers have compared instant prices to book an MOT, service or repair on bookmygarage.com

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secretservice.co.uk

4.7* on Trustpilot



Kieran Nizzer, group marketing manager (second from right), collected the award from Mark Ferdinando, sales manager of sponsors SecretService (right). Nizzer was joined by Holdcroft colleagues (from left) Samantha Bellingham, digital content creator Adam Welch and digital marketing specialist Katie Shannon

ONLINE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF THE YEAR (FRANCHISED)

Winner: Holdcroft Motor Group

Taking inspiration from many other industries, especially e-commerce, Holdcroft's digital-first strategy has created a sophisticated and successful online customer experience.

Almost half of all enquiries into the business originate from the Holdcroft website, which has been evolving since its 2020 launch.

Launching the website in the middle of the pandemic was tough, but it allowed Holdcroft to position itself as having a solution that allowed people to buy from home, feel secure with a money-back guarantee and experience virtual walkaround video tours of cars.

The group's 10-strong marketing team uses data to help inform fortnightly website changes, responding to clicks, heat-mapping and Google Analytics.

Inspiration from e-commerce and other sectors has prompted improvements such as adding a hybrid chatbot, WhatsApp and search alerts which have contributed to record results.

The website generated 7% more sales and reservation leads in 2022, with conversion up from 24% to 26%.

Aftersales bookings were up 28% to generate more than six figures in additional revenue, mainly due to a new end-to-end online booking feature.

The business has sold vehicles worth more than a combined £1 million wholly online in 2022 due to establishing those solid foundations for distance selling during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The judges agreed that Holdcroft's savvy social strategy supports a carefully curated online consumer experience that delivers.

Content is key and the business has positioned itself as an authority for customers with six social media channels, including YouTube and TikTok, to help drive traffic and engagement to its website.

Holdcroft has its own content creator who has helped grow engagement (up 56% in 2022), reach (up 47%) and followers (up 62%).

The number of users arriving to Holdcroft's website from social channels has increased by 310% in 2022. New users are up 3,535% and bounce rate is down 54%, indicating the effectiveness of its social channels in delivering engaged consumers to its website.

A continued focus on creating a class-leading online customer experience has seen Holdcroft rated at 93% for customer satisfaction across 17,000 JudgeService reviews.

HIGHLY COMMENDED
Arbury Motor Group

SHORTLISTED
Arbury Motor Group
H R Owen
Harwoods

Holdcroft Motor Group
TrustFord

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Ben Mills, digital marketing specialist (third from right), Jade Walton, group marketing manager (second from right), and colleagues Lias Gray, sales manager (second left), and Katie Drury, marketing assistant (third from left), all of FOW Car Supermarket, picked up the award from Katie Hayes, chief operating officer of sponsors Evolution Funding (right)

ONLINE CONSUMER EXPERIENCE OF THE YEAR (INDEPENDENT)

Winner: FOW Car Supermarket

FOW is once again leading the independent dealer sector with back-to-back wins for its outstanding online consumer experience, which is centred around two pillars – transparency and enjoyment.

The business has continued to build on its digital expertise with a team of three dedicated content creators, each responsible for website development and implementation, as well as systems training for the entire company and its 230 employees.

The website has been designed to help customers easily review affordability for vehicles they are interested in, with a dynamic finance calculator on all relevant pages, free credit check software and a bespoke part-exchange tool.

This online journey launched after a 12 month

development programme to ensure all digital limitations in the customer experience were eliminated. If a customer buys online, the car is automatically reserved and off sale for 30 minutes to allow plenty of time to checkout.

FOW has seen online part-exchanges increase 245% year-on-year due to a re-designed online valuation journey, online reservations rose by 54% and 14% of total sales were wholly online.

These e-commerce sales increased by 15% in 2022 due to increased conversions and an uptick in video production and commitment to social media engagement to drive customers to the FOW website.

The business has seen an uptake of 74.2% in new visitors over the last year, with time on-site increasing by 42.5% over the same period.

User engagement has increased by 15.38% across all platforms in 2022, with TikTok and YouTube in particular increasing by 650% combined over the past 12 months.

The team at FOW has embraced video to produce fun and creative content to keep customers engaged with the brand.

FOW's own consumer research has shown that more than 40% of customers are more likely to buy a car if there's a video available. To address this, every customer is offered a complimentary personalised video.

All videos are scripted, filmed and edited in-house. The judges agreed that FOW's video content helps to "sprinkle extra magic" on the FOW car shopping experience.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Frosts Cars

SHORTLISTED

FOW Car Supermarket
Frosts Cars
SUV Prestige

Sponsored by





Ben Mills, digital marketing specialist, (holding trophy), and Jade Walton, group marketing manager (second from right), were joined by colleagues Lias Gray, sales manager (right), and Katie Durry, marketing assistant (second left), all of FOW Car Supermarket, to collect the award from Simon Whicher, sales director of sponsors Cooper Solutions – part of PIB Automotive – (third from right)

EV DEALERSHIP OF THE YEAR

Winner: FOW Car Supermarket

FOW Car Supermarket has adapted its strategy to optimise the sale of electric vehicles (EVs), both digitally and in-store. The business specialises in used vehicles and operates from two locations in the north-west, covering Cheshire and Manchester.

In order to understand the barriers to EV ownership, the company implemented a training programme for its sales and product specialist teams and based all content around Google search terms to best optimise the customer digital and in-store experience.

The company identified that an ability to discuss all elements of EV ownership with confidence is key to driving sales and instilling consumer confidence at an early stage.

Its customer service product specialist team can answer both the most commonly asked and complex questions about EV ownership.

Recognising the challenging market conditions, FOW has made a significant effort to promote EV ownership positively. In 2022 it mapped out a strategy for its content creation team to develop EV content using an SEO-centric approach.

Utilising social media to great effect, it has been able to drive sentiment towards EV ownership creatively.

It also upskilled all its technicians to level 3 and level 4 master EV qualifications and introduced a new EV multipoint check alongside a comprehensive battery health check.

To complement the buying journey, FOW has also invested in a solar project comprising 339 solar panels alongside a 133% increase in its EV charge points.

A partnership with Go Zero provides customers with access to suitable home charging solutions.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

eStar Truck & Van

SHORTLISTED

eStar Truck & Van
FOW Car Supermarket
Vindis Cambridge Volkswagen

Sponsored by



Mike Thompson, chief operating officer, Leasing Options (centre), collected the award from AM group editor Stephen Briers



LEASING OPERATION OF THE YEAR

Winner: Leasing Options

Despite unprecedented challenges for the auto industry over the past few years, Leasing Options has continued to expand, grow profits and introduce new initiatives.

The company has invested in CRM technology and uses marketing insight to match bespoke deals to its customers. Its marketing experts ensure all touchpoints are also tailored to the individual.

While the majority of Leasing Options' agreements are with private buyers, it also provides

vehicles to businesses, ranging from sole traders to large corporates. Growth in the fleet sector was accelerated two years ago with the acquisition of Allied Vehicle Contracts.

In 2021, Leasing Options reacted to rising interest from customers in electric vehicles (EVs) to launch a dedicated electric division, supported by key partnerships with the likes of charge point provider Pod Point. It has subsequently seen a 74% year-on-year increase in EV orders.

The company, which works with some of the UK's

larger funding providers, including Lex Autolease, LeasePlan, Arval and ALD, is committed to regulatory compliance, including governance and risk, which is reflected in the creation of a dedicated compliance function.

This monitors internal policies and procedures and constantly reviews all elements of staff induction to ensure regulatory future-proofing.

Leasing Options has also invested in its new facilities as well as wellbeing initiatives to support its team.

SHORTLISTED

Arbury Leasing
Carparison
Leasing Options