

# The Universal Journal of 21st Century Women's Entrepreneurship & Leadership (UJWEL)

## The Women's World Car of the Year: How Women Are Changing the Auto Industry



**Renuka kirpalani**

Executive Editor Video Content, Autocar India

Since the inception of the automobile industry, men have predominantly been the drivers and creators of vehicles. However, a group of women decided to shake things up and started the Women's World Car of the Year awards in 2009. The aim was to create a platform where women could take charge and judge the best cars in the world.

Fast forward to today, and the Women's World Car of the Year is a globally recognized award for excellence in the automobile industry. It comprises a panel of female judges from all around the world. These women drive, own and live in different regions of the world, giving a perspective that is often missed in a male-dominated industry.

Sandy Myhre Founder & Honorary President from New Zealand says "It started off with just eight journalists on the jury. There were some editors who wouldn't give me the email addresses of their female motoring writers but, with the eight we got it was a start.

From there we had our first press conference in London at a Jaguar showroom. There were quite a lot of media there so we were established as an entity and, over the years as the publicity grew, more women wanted to come on to the jury. It was the snowball effect.

I was happy to be one of the founder members with Sandy and the group has come a very long way. Sandy handed over the reins to Marta Garcia from Spain who is currently the President.

Marta has worked at building the organisation and taken it to new strengths with 65 members of the jury from 47 countries.

Marta says "WWCOTY's opinion matters and is taken into account by millions of women and men because driving a car is not about gender, race or anything else. It is about passion.

But WWCOTY has another equally important goal: to help raise the profile of women in the automotive world. Women represent barely 25% of the jobs in the sector

when in fact we are around 50% of the drivers. The automotive industry must open its doors wide to women, incorporating them not only as consumers but also as engineers, human resources experts, drivers, salespeople, communicators... If we succeed in doing so, not only will we women have won, but also the industry and society in general."

The group has initiated the Woman of Worth award to celebrate women in all walks of the automotive world. This year the awards was won by Dr. Astrid Linder - Research Director at Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute. She was the the one who designed and initiator of the world's first female crash test dummy.

This year's list of winners includes the latest Hyundai Tucson, Mazda MX-30, and Porsche 911 Turbo S. The winners are judged on several parameters such as comfort, safety, accessibility, and of course, environmental impact. The judges take a fully-fledged perspective on factors and vote on a variety of parameters. While people may think that the winner is a car for women voted by women, that is not the case. The Juror from Chile, Francisca Muñoz Matus drives home the point saying "in WWCOTY there are no cars for women or men, there are only cars" She adds " It brings together women motor industry journalists from all over the world; it allows sharing different visions, cultures, experiences. And they are also an incredible human group, who helps each other and seek to push and highlight the female presence in a field that is still very masculine."

The success of the Women's World Car of the Year awards is proof that women's voices matter, and they are beginning to take a more critical role in the automobile industry. Women drivers are no longer a minority in the automobile industry, and their needs have changed the industry as a whole. Automakers are now designing cars that are more practical, comfortable and affordable for women. Features, such as adjustable seats, child seats, and parking sensors, are becoming increasingly common in cars designed for women.

Moreover, the Women's World Car of the Year award is creating a ripple effect in the industry. It's providing recognition and encouragement for women who are making strides in the industry, from designing engines to leading auto companies. The award is continually expanding, encompassing an increasing number of female judges from an ever-increasing number of countries, making it all the more representative of a global women's voice.

While this is a group of Women motoring journalists with a strong presence and voice it isn't always easy. Isadora Carvalho, an automotive journalist in Brazil says " I had a boss who prevented me from appraising cars for no real reason. I could only write about behavior and the automotive market. And that phase lasted almost five years in my career. I currently do car reviews, but I had to make up for lost time."

Christina Myrto Stathaki from Greece added " We don't have the same opportunities, we are getting payed less for the same or more work and we don't get promotions as males do. Between the 98 members of the "National Association of Car and Motorcycle Journalists" only two are women."

Sara Soria from Spain also had to face some discrimination, this is what she had to say "Among fellow journalists, I have always felt like one of them. I have very good colleagues. I did have to suffer some discrimination from the company where I worked when I became a mother and reduced my working hours as my promotion options were reduced. And now that I am more exposed in the media because of the videos I make, I do receive some sexist comments but they are in the minority."

Her story is similar to mine where I found great acceptance amongst my peers and colleagues from my racing and rallying days to my current profile as an automotive journalist. I have always had a strong level of support from my male colleagues and an acceptance of the largely male audience, which has been the reason for my success. However in the new age of social media and trolls, it is also the only area I have experienced discrimination with comments on how a woman with grey hair shouldn't be reviewing cars or that a petite woman shouldn't review a big car etc. But my view is to focus on the subject and cut out the noise. The goal should be to be well versed in our domain and that's all that matters.

The Women's World Car of the Year is changing the auto industry in ways that were once unimaginable. Women play a critical role in the driving experience and deserve recognition. They have instituted the international Women Drivers Day on 24th June to draw attention to all the facts on how women influence a lot of car buying decisions globally. More and more the presence of women is increasing in what was considered to be a male dominated domain. From designing and judging the best cars to being the drivers themselves,

women are increasing their influence in the industry. The Women's World Car of the Year award has brought about an essential change, voicing the need to create cars that meet the needs of women, celebrating women in the industry, putting the spotlight on women motoring journalists across the world and putting women's voices at the forefront of the industry.

### Biography:

Renuka Kirpalani is currently the host and editor of the Autocar show on Times Network and is the Executive Editor Video content for Autocar India which includes a channel on youtube with over 2 million followers.

A well respected name in the automotive world her job includes test driving and reviewing all the cars for the Indian Market apart from being responsible for all the video content at Hay market group of Publications in India.

Winning her very first race against a field of 18 men in 1990 she went on to have successful career in racing and rallying. Culminating in winning the Indian National championship in rallying as a navigator. Renuka learned the ropes about cars working with her father a well known tuner and prepared her own race and rally cars as well.

She recently set a record to become the fastest Indian woman clocking a top speed of 357.10 Km/h at Natrax in Indore, in the Pininfarina Battista

She has also organised various overland drives and driven in them like the ASEAN rally from Singapore to India and the Saarc & BCIM rallies which were all for Govt of India. She has also organised and driven overland for Autocar India from Germany to India and India to Paris.

Renuka is also a juror on many prestigious world automotive awards such as: World car of the year, Women World car of the year, Autocar India Award