

THE BIG 5

ROBBIE STAMMERS GIVES US A GUIDED TOUR OF THE NEW, EXCITING VEHICLES THAT HAVE BEEN SPOTTED ON OUR ROADS RECENTLY

Like the Big 5 in the bush, these vehicles have unique characteristics: some may be featured for their strength and speed, and others for their comfort and size.

In Africa, the Big 5 game animals are the lion, African elephant, Cape buffalo, leopard and rhinoceros. The term 'big five game' was coined by big-game hunters, and refers to the five African animals that are most difficult to hunt on foot.

Subsequently, the term was adopted by safari tour operators for marketing purposes. For our purposes, we have chosen this quarter's five preferred vehicles to review. Some would be ideal for an intrepid adventure into the bush, while others would be more suited to the concrete jungle and the school run.

A Taste of India – Mahindra Xylo 2015

The face-lifted Mahindra Xylo has hit local shores and has some rather interesting changes made to both its exterior and interior. For instance, the Xylo now has a new chrome garnish strip on the bonnet just above the grille, which cuts across the prominent Mahindra badge and goes well with the bonnet lines on the car. The same chrome treatment has been extended to the rear, with a chrome strip running across the tailgate.

The Indian market has a certain soft spot for beige interiors. Although the Xylo already came with a beige interior with a wood lookalike inlay in the dashboard and on the centre console, the new model has been updated to look more premium than ever before. For starters, the plastic panels have now been updated and come in a shade of black as opposed to the generic brown offered earlier. Not only does this make the interior of the vehicle look more mature and luxurious, it has also helped decrease the overall clutter on the inside.

The Mahindra Xylo has always been quite spacious, and the new one continues that trend. The driver now gets a height-adjustable seat that highly improves the driving position and comfort.

The biggest addition to the new Xylo is cruise control. Apart from that, the Xylo now comes with follow-me-home headlamps. The Bluetooth-enabled infotainment system has remained pretty much unchanged. Another feature is the electronically adjustable outside rear-view mirrors, but the vehicle still lacks climate control.

Mechanically, Mahindra has concentrated primarily on the suspension setup of the new Xylo. And this is evident from the second you drive the car over bumpy surfaces. The new car is much more composed and definitely more comfortable than before.



Hit the road, Jack

The Xylo is driven by the powerful Mahindra signature mHAWK 2.2-litre turbo-diesel engine that provides best-in-class power (89kW) and torque (290Nm)—which makes it drive well, but it's certainly not going to win any drag races. Be that as it may, it's a very comfortable and versatile eight-seater, and should sell well as a good family-carrier.

The vehicle comes standard with a three-year/100 000km warranty and a three-year/60 000km service plan.

Price tags

Xylo E2 – R192 978.07 (excl. VAT)

Xylo E8 – R214 907.89 (excl. VAT)

Pure power – New Subaru WRX

The minute you hear the engine of this baby purr and rev, a smile will fall across your face.

The all-new Subaru WRX is now available in South Africa. Building on a long history and poised to continue to enjoy a cult following in the country, the new WRX conforms to traditional WRX characteristics while elevating the driving experience and premium feel with high specifications and advanced technical engineering. Born out of the World Rally Championship, the Subaru WRX is revered the world over as one of the most formidable sports vehicles.

The all-new WRX represents a new era for Subaru's greatest performance vehicle. Featuring new-age drivetrain technology including Sports Lineartronic™ and Active Torque Vectoring, a new turbocharged Boxer® engine, Subaru's famous Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive™ and refined appointment, the new WRX subscribes perfectly to the Subaru ethos of 'Confidence in Motion'. The new WRX also brings true sports car performance and handling to a more affordable level, being benchmarked against some of the world's most venerated sports cars but available at a much lower price level.

The new WRX presents an all-new body design and is available only in sedan form. Embodying the latest in Subaru design DNA, the taut, muscular and wide stance of the new WRX conveys an immediate sense of sporty, powerful driving fun. True to type, the wide body design and aggressive visage impart the kind of cheeky and virile attitude for which the WRX has become famous,

with the downsized headlights designed to make the new model look like a raptor eyeing its prey.

Sports overtones abound, of course: the deep front air dam being matched by the signature bonnet scoop; the dark-painted 17-inch alloy wheels being accented by muscular side skirts; and the pert rear end, which features an integrated boot spoiler and sculpted tail lights, rounding off the athletic look with a diffuser and dual-twin exhaust outlets.

The interior of the new model is a pure exhibition of luxury and premium quality meeting a sporty attitude and true WRX functionality. Under the bonnet, it displaces 2.0 litres, with the direct injection turbo-charged DOHC Boxer® engine producing 197kW at 5 600rpm and a steady 350Nm of torque between 2 400 and 5 200rpm. The 0-100km/h sprint is dispatched in 6.0 seconds in the manual derivative (6.3 seconds for the Sport Lineartronic™ derivative) and top speed is a steady 240km/h.

The new Subaru WRX comes standard with a three-year/100 000km warranty and Subaru's three-year/75 000km maintenance plan, which can be optionally extended at purchase. Service intervals are every 15 000km.

Price tags:

WRX Premium 6MT R449 000

WRX Premium Sport

Lineartronic™ CVT R469 000

French flair – New Renault Mégane Model GT

Since its 1995 début, the Renault Mégane has been accorded the prestigious title of flagship model of the French automaker's line-up—and with the revitalisation of each successive edition in the 19 years since, the magnificent Mégane continues to take the international motoring modelling ramp by storm.

Renault just keeps pulling pure magic out of its hat, and when ogling the sensuously stylish lines and distinctive design of the New Renault Mégane Model Year 2014 line-up, you'll be hard pressed not to agree!

Refined yet assertive, the New Mégane engages the senses on sight and it's easy to see why. The imposing centrepiece diamond-shaped badge dominates the black grille, serving to underscore the brand's new design identity. Front LEDs



complement this and add the final touch.

The Mégane MY2014 range is completely new and built around three levels: the top-of-the range New Mégane GT Turbo 162kW, mid-range GT-Line Turbo 97kW and base-level Dynamique 81kW.

The core of the New Mégane MY2014 line-up is the two new sister versions: GT-Line Turbo and GT Turbo. While they share the same design refinement, together with intelligent technologies DNA, they tend to address clients' expectations slightly differently: outstanding fuel efficiency for the GT-Line Turbo; and spirited performance for everyday use for the GT Turbo.

The range has been designed in order to underpin Renault's leadership in terms of intelligent and progressive technologies by focusing on delivering the highest level of safety combined with the most updated and intuitive on-board experience.

Indeed, all versions of the New Mégane MY2014 range come standard with six airbags: front, side and curtain (with anti-submerging airbags an addition to the Coupé derivatives); ABS coupled with emergency brake assist; cruise control plus speed limiter and electronic stability control with electronic anti-slip regulation; and 3-point ISOFIX seat anchorage on side rear seats.

Also standard across the range are intelligent technologies that ensure the most updated and intuitive on-board experience, such as dual-zone climate control, fingertip controls behind the steering wheel, integrated navigation system including Live services, Bluetooth connectivity, USB port, auto locking/unlocking system and rear park assist.

Over and above the innovations derived from Formula 1, the new Turbo 97kW engine adopts the most modern technological solutions: 100% aluminium block, variable-valve timing at intake and exhaust, controlled variable oil pump, stop/start function plus energy smart management, including regenerative braking system.

The result is an exceptional output for a 1.2-litre engine of 97kW at 5 500rpm and maximum torque of 205Nm available between 2 000 and 3 000rpm—improved even more thanks to its overboost function (peak torque at 225Nm). It outperforms the 1.4 Turbo that it replaces, and is equivalent or superior to the naturally aspirated 1.6, 1.8 or even 2.0-litre engines on offer by its competitors.

Delivering excellent performance (0-100km/h in 9.7 seconds) and maximum speed of 200km/h, the driving pleasure afforded by the Renault's new Turbo 97kW power plant stems from its extreme responsiveness, with 90% of its maximum torque available from 1 500rpm.



Highly fuel-efficient with very low consumption of 5.4 litres per 100km, it generates 124g CO₂/km. This represents an improvement of -14% compared to the previous 1.4 Turbo engine (6.3 litres/100km, 145g CO₂/km).

In terms of exterior design, the GT Turbo has the specific front and rear bumpers, dark-grey door handles and side mirrors in common with its mid-level GT-Line Turbo sibling. Its outer good looks are further complemented by the fitment of 18-inch alloy wheels, GT signature on the boot lid as well as below the diamond badge centrepiece that fronts the grille.

Its sporty and sophisticated interior boasts combination fabric/leather seats that also reflect the exclusive GT signature, Renault Sport-specific dash cluster and a dashboard-integrated grey line. To finish off, the front-door sills are clad with Renault Sport-branded protectors.

The three derivatives that make up the New Mégane Model Year 2014 range are available in Hatch (five-door) or Coupé (three-door) body shape options. Both body shape options offer the exact same specifications and are identically priced.

All I can say is: *Vive la France!*

Price tags:

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| New Mégane MY2014 Dynamique 81kW (Hatch or Coupé) | R249 900 |
| New Mégane MY2014 GT-Line Turbo 97kW (Hatch or Coupé) | R279 900 |
| New Mégane MY2014 GT Turbo 162kW (Hatch or Coupé) | R329 900 |

Upping the ante – Honda Ballade 2014

Three years after the new-generation Ballade was launched in South Africa, Honda Motor Southern Africa has released an all-new, second-generation Ballade.

The 2014 Ballade ups the ante at every level: from its streamlined shape and even more spacious interior to exceptional safety standards, improved dynamics and greater efficiency. At the same time, the new-generation Ballade continues Honda's long-established reputation for quality, longevity and reliability. The Ballade also offers an extended list of standard features across its two specification levels, many of which entrench the Honda's class-leading status in this segment.

Already Honda's best-selling sedan in South Africa, this latest Ballade is expected to attract an even greater number of buyers seeking a vital mix of value, space and performance.

Crucially, the Ballade doesn't rely on older-generation



technology, and delivers several innovations including an all-new continuously variable transmission (CVT) featuring Honda's Earth Dreams Technology, with seven 'virtual' gears that allow it to make the most of the engine's urge; and a touchscreen-based infotainment system that offers an array of powerful features.

Strongly emphasised style lines create a more powerful, more confident side-on appearance, while the rear treatment continues to underscore the smooth flow of the Ballade's design.

The drivetrain of the new Ballade appears similar to that of the outgoing model—but as the statistics prove, it delivers more pep, better efficiency and lower emissions. The engine is still a 1.5-litre four-cylinder unit, and the output figures have remained at 88kW power and 145Nm torque.

The Earth Dreams initiative seeks to create intelligently engineered, efficient technologies that also deliver environmental benefits. Thus, the CVT's reduced weight and greater efficiency result in reduced fuel consumption and emissions. All in all, one can't go wrong with this vehicle.

The pricing includes a three-year/100 000km warranty, a four-year/60 000km service plan, and one-year roadside assistance.

Price tags:

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Honda Ballade 1.5 Trend | R195 900 |
| Honda Ballade 1.5 Trend CVT | R210 500 |
| Honda Ballade 1.5 Elegance | R220 990 |
| Honda Ballade 1.5 Elegance CVT | R235 590 |

The gift that keeps on giving – Volvo XC60 T5

I've had the pleasure of driving the XC60 before and, although I wasn't always a die-hard Volvo fan, this beauty had me wrapped around her finger. Then I was given the turbo version—and I was completely sold!

The Volvo XC60 remains the most popular Swedish car in the world, thanks to its European styling, excellent safety features and practical interior. But are those enough reasons to buy it over its

German rivals? I certainly think so.

The once all-encompassing drawcard of Volvo models was safety; however, in the last decade, most of the company's active and passive safety features have been matched—and in some cases even surpassed—by competitor brands. That means the Volvo XC60 needs to win the battle for your purchasing decision based on other merits.

From a styling perspective, the Volvo SUV ticks a lot of boxes, without being too conservative. Inside, Volvo continues to impress, with high-quality finishes throughout the cabin and limited noise intrusion even at highway speeds. The centre console controls are laid out in a simple yet elegant and driver-focused manner, which helps you get the most out of the now-undersized 7.0-inch screen.

My Volvo XC60 T5—the brand's front-wheel-drive turbocharged petrol model that delivers a whopping 180kW of power and 350Nm of torque from its new 2.0-litre four-cylinder Drive-E engine—had me wanting to dash out and buy milk when the wife didn't even need any!

My only annoyance was the start-stop system, but thankfully that can be turned off, and it isn't unique to Volvo. The eight-speed automatic gearbox, instead of a six-speed dual-clutch transmission, is super smooth and effortless in its shifts. Fuel economy is officially rated at 7.0 litres/100km, which is pretty impressive.

Despite its safety credentials no longer being a primary buying motivator, the XC60 does come with its fair share of active systems including the very useful City Safety feature that automatically brakes the Volvo at up to 50km/h in the event of an imminent collision.

These Swedes sure know their stuff! ☺

Price tags:

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|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| XC60 T5 Geartronic Essential | R494 100 |
| XC60 T5 Geartronic Excel | R501 700 |
| XC60 T5 Geartronic Elite | R510 900 |