

Hyundai Elantra Wins Car Of Year

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DETROIT (AP) — The Hyundai Elantra edged out the Ford Focus and Volkswagen Passat Monday to win the 2012 North American Car of the Year award.

The prestigious industry award was announced at the start of the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, which hosts media previews this week and opens to the public on Saturday.

The Land Rover Range Rover Evoque won the North American Truck of the Year, beating the BMW X3 and Honda CR-V. The Evoque, which starts at \$43,995, gets an estimated 18 miles per gallon in city driving and 28 mpg on the highway.

Jaguar Land Rover North America President Andy Goss said it's a tremendous honor and humbling for the company, which has had had finalists but never a winner in the 19th annual independent awards program.

"We're going to market the hell out of this," said a smiling Goss on a stage above the four-cylinder sport-utility vehicle. The U.S. is the world's largest Range Rover market.

Fifty automotive journalists voted on the winning vehicles from a group of finalists, and the vehicles must be all new or substantially changed to be eligible. Organizers accept no advertising, though automakers capitalize on the marketing value of the honors.

John Krafcik, Hyundai's North American CEO, said the award won't help the compact's sales much because the company already is selling as many Elantras as it can make at its factory in Montgomery, Ala. But the award should help solidify the brand's image in the eyes of the American public, especially in the highly competitive compact car segment.

"It should be helpful for our brand going forward," he said.

The Elantra, which starts at \$16,445, gets an estimated 33 mpg.

The company is looking at ways to boost production at the Montgomery plant, but Krafcik said Hyundai plans to focus on maintaining quality at the factory before deciding on any increases.

Hyundai sold more than 186,000 Elantras last year, nearly a 41 percent increase over 2010 figures.

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

Source URL (retrieved on 04/26/2015 - 1:13am):

<http://www.impomag.com/news/2012/01/hyundai-elantra-wins-car-year>