

JEERBOX

Europe's Car of the Year has shaken up its jury. Like the rest of car journalism, **Simon Hacker** warns COTY is still a male coterie, and female car hacks remain an endangered species

What does it take to be a car hack? A love of cars? Naturally. A love of language? It can help, though it's often demonstrated as not crucial. Male anatomy? Absolutely! In 2014, this

specification is still as important as a passport and DVLA documentation. Last summer, a festering issue in automotive journalism tweaked my inner feminist. Or at least rattled my suspicion that chauvinism thrives in the car media...

1 This is the thing. Women are spectacularly failing to work in automotive journalism. The Guild of Motoring Writers (GoMW) currently has 424 active UK and Irish members. But with just 34 being female, it represents women to the tune of just under eight per cent. Whatever your gender, the GoMW is keen to accept anyone who's a kosher car journalist, so this percentage reveals a bleak snapshot of females in the business.



2 The problem is global. And nowhere is this lack of representation more brazen than among the juries of our two biggest award groups: European Car of the Year (ECOTY) and its broader equivalent, the World Car of the Year (WCOTY). ECOTY added six new jurors to its line-up for 2014. At last, you might have thought, they are trying to correct the problem of being more than 98 per cent male (ie one woman among 58 judges). But with the number of judges remaining unchanged, no new females were co-opted. Of 22 countries represented, Ulla Elmer, a freelance writer from Germany, remains on board. If she's charged with showing ECOTY's softer side, it's an uphill task. The six newcomers certainly do nothing to alter ECOTY's image as an old, or middle-aged, boys' club. Peugeot's 308 won the 2014 contest, but in reality, that means European men like this car. MECOTY would be a fairer acronym.



3 WCOTY, on the face of it, is more enlightened: it's got 68 members from around the world (six British, all very male). Yet with only three female judges, WCOTY actually scores less than 4.5 per cent on the girlo-meter (and more than 95 per cent as a gentleman's club). How so? Executive manager Beth Rhind tells me jurors are chosen on the basis of their "recognized stature within their respective regions, their exposure and access to new vehicles on a global basis and their audience reach". Representing the globe, she tells me, is the prime concern: "We strive to include those that best satisfy these criteria, independent of gender." Could more women get on board? "We welcome others who qualify to join their ranks. Juror appointments change annually," was all she would say.



4 How do female car journalists feel about a playing field that requires crampons? Aurora Eastwood runs the womeninwheels.co.uk blog – a spiky read for anyone fine tuning their radar to this smouldering issue. She says she'd be happy to join WCOTY, but has little faith. "I despair at the lack of women in motoring full stop. I get rejected by all but the most enlightened editors because most still think men don't want to hear about cars from women."

5 The common response to disgruntled egalitarians is to steer them in the direction of the Women's World Car of the Year, set up in 2009 to judge cars "according to the criteria women utilise when buying a car", whatever they are. The notion that a distinct award should be set up for the views of female drivers has many chewing at their keyboards. "It's rampant gender apartheid," one journalist tells me who asked to remain anonymous. "The horrible ludicrousness of the idea that women automatically judge cars by different standards is manifestly indefensible. How do they judge differently? Are they are looking for handbag storage and a make-up mirror?" Aurora Eastwood suggests manufacturers themselves could do far more to encourage a culture where gender doesn't matter, but their tone of advertising often reveals they still believe cars are boys' toys. Among others, she slams Citroën for a "patronising" ad which suggests its DS3 can match your nail varnish.



6 So should women leave this game to the boys who long to keep it that way? None who have succeeded would agree. Liz Turner, an auto hack who cracked the game, offers one career tip for women seeking to break through that glass sunroof: "Bloody minded persistence." Frankly, anyone hoping to drive sexism out of motoring is going to need it. **DC**