**Rising Demand for Mini SUVs a Positive Sign for Newest Ford EcoSport Ambiente Auto**

* The mini SUV segment, which includes the Ford EcoSport, has grown from 4 percent in 2015 to 10 percent market share in 2020
* South Africa’s extensive gravel road network favours cars with bigger tyres and extra ground clearance
* More and more drivers are choosing vehicles with automatic transmissions, according to new sales data from Ford

**PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA, 13 July 2020** – With the launch of the Ford Figo Freestyle and EcoSport Ambiente Auto, which went on sale earlier in 2020, Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa (FMCSA) continues to respond to the undeniable change in buying patterns that has seen volumes of sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and small crossovers grow. Designed with an active lifestyle in mind, these body styles have risen in demand over the last decade, outnumbering and outperforming the traditional sedan and family hatchback for space, practicality and visual appeal.

Recent research conducted by Ford echoes this trend. The mini SUV segment, which includes the EcoSport, has grown from 4 percent in 2015 to 10 percent market share of the Total Industry sales in 2020, with many predicting a similar upwards trajectory beyond 2020.

“The mini SUV segment grew substantially with the maiden launch of the EcoSport in South Africa in 2013, and the model has dominated this class ever since,” says Atloli Lesela, brand manager for passenger cars at FMCSA. “The recent introduction of a six-speed automatic transmission for the EcoSport 1.5 Ambiente represents another trend-setting move for this successful model, which now also offers the best value for money automatic in the entry-level mini utility segment.”

More and more drivers are choosing vehicles with automatic transmissions, according to new sales data from Ford. In the last three years alone, the number of passenger cars and multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs) Ford has sold in Europe with an automatic transmission has more than tripled from 10.4 percent in 2017 to 31.3 percent during the first month of 2020.

“Among the many benefits of automatic transmissions are that they enable drivers to enjoy the very latest driver assist technology, making everything, from parking to stop-start traffic, easier and more comfortable,” says Lesela.

From a South African customer perspective, the online searched data is equally compelling. According to [George Mienie](https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/vv8hC98X0ntBQg8hobBAo), CEO of [AutoTrader](https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/oL1eC0g3G4F3VDjuDAZQT), SUVs are far more popular than sedans in South Africa. “In June 2020, there were 35 percent more searches for SUVs than for sedans. Searches for transmission type is overwhelmingly in favour of automatics\*. “In June, 72 percent of consumers who filtered by gearbox transmission when searching for the EcoSport wanted an automatic, whereas 26 percent searched for manual; the remaining 2 percent searched for a combination.” says Mienie.

South Africa’s requirements for SUVs and small crossovers are perhaps even more obvious than in other parts of the world. The country’s extensive gravel road network can be especially punishing on a car’s suspension and tyres. SUVs and crossovers can mitigate this harshness through slightly longer suspension travel and bigger 205/60 16-inch tyres, fitted to the EcoSport Ambiente and Trend models. In the unlikely event that a puncture does occur, the boot-mounted full size spare wheel on the EcoSport is easy to access. The EcoSport Ambiente’s ground clearance of 206mm also adds peace of mind, reducing the chance of the car’s underside from hitting bigger stones that could damage vulnerable parts of the engine and drivetrain. An underbody protection shield on Trend and Titanium models makes the EcoSport even more robust for less-than-perfect roads

Apart from being able to confidently access beautiful corners of the country often interconnected by these gravel routes, a mini SUV like the Ford EcoSport has other advantages that need to be considered.

The higher seating position is a useful characteristic that creates a feeling of security and unobscured visibility. Sitting higher allows the driver to make better and earlier decisions on the road - this can be the difference between hitting a pothole or easily avoiding it. Greater outward visibility also gives the driver confidence to correctly judge narrow parking bays and congested traffic.

Safety is also an important consideration, and the EcoSport provides a superb level of occupant protection thanks to the inclusion of six airbags on even the entry-level Ambiente models. Furthermore, to help the driver maintain control in emergency situations, active driving safety features such as ABS brakes, Electronic Stability Control (ESC) with Traction Control (TC) are fitted as standard across the range. Combined with the EcoSport’s compact footprint and small turning circle, the enhanced EcoSport range is ideally suited to all scenarios, family sizes and road surfaces. Whether you’re seeking a quick weekend getaway or just want to be wrapped in a cocoon of safety from the dense city streets, the EcoSport range is the complete all-rounder.

Read the latest news from Ford South Africa by visiting the Newsroom:

[https://www.ford.co.za/about-ford/newsroom/](https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/XmERCJZX3LtDzorcVTrnv)

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