**Ford Strengthens its Commitment to Customer Service and Satisfaction**

* New customer experience (CX) model introduced to better serve owners of Ford vehicles, and build long-term brand loyalty
* Ranger Support Team established to proactively respond to any Ranger or Everest breakdowns, provide immediate and ongoing customer support, expedite parts delivery and prioritise the vehicle repair to reduce downtime
* Automated alert system developed that identifies and escalates any vehicles that have been in for repairs at a Ford dealer for more than four days
* Within two months of launching this program, the average number of days affected Ranger customers were without their vehicles was reduced by 65 percent

**pretoria,** **South Africa, 22 October 2020** – Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa (FMCSA) has strengthened its commitment to customer service and satisfaction by developing a new customer experience (CX) model to better serve owners of Ford vehicles, and build long-term brand loyalty.

“Customer satisfaction is central to our business, and it’s for this reason that Ford Motor Company introduced dedicated CX teams to find new and proactive ways of supporting our customers, and to ensure that we deliver a positive ownership experience,” says Neale Hill, MD of FMCSA.

“One of the major areas we focused on was creating a faster and more responsive way of dealing with issues that result in a customer’s vehicle spending time in a dealership as opposed to where it belongs – with the owner who bought the vehicle to serve a purpose and to fulfil a need,” Hill adds. “We prioritised taking care of the customers’ immediate safety and mobility requirements, and then work closely with key dealers on major routes around the country to ensure that vehicles are repaired and back on the road as soon as possible.”

With the Ford Ranger pickup being the company’s most popular vehicle and one of South Africa’s top sellers, the team prioritised support for the Ranger, as well as the Everest sport utility vehicle (SUV) – both of which are produced at Ford’s Silverton Assembly Plant – during the initial phase of the program in South Africa.

A specialised Ranger Support Team was established, using a cross-functional team of customer case manaqers, technical specialists and parts experts that work together with the dealer to better support customers should something go wrong with their vehicle while covered under the standard warranty, which is valid for four years/120 000km.

“Our goal was to reduce customer downtime, a key pain point for anyone that experiences a vehicle breakdown,” explains Maja Smith, Customer Experience manager at FMCSA. “Research and customer surveys show that even if a customer experiences an issue with a product, being treated with honesty, urgency and care by the company involved is likely to result in a positive customer rating that is higher than if they hadn’t experienced the problem in the first place.

“Traditionally, such incidents are handled reactively by customer service departments and call centres, but our new CX model uses a proactive approach that is quite different from the norm,” Smith points out. “The moment our Roadside Assistance is notified of a Ranger breakdown, our Ranger Support Team kicks into action.”

A single case manager oversees the case from start to finish, and contacts the customer immediately to offer whatever support and assistance they require. Ford will arrange armed security to wait with the customer until the recovery vehicle arrives if required, organise a like-for-like loan car and book accommodation for them if necessary.

“Transparency and communication are key to building trust with our customers, and the case managers continually keep the customer informed of the progress,” Smith says. The case manager coordinates with the dealership to prioritise the necessary repairs, and is supported by a parts specialist to expedite the delivery of any required items if the dealer doesn’t have them in stock. The entire process is managed through a Customer Case Progress Tracker, which provides end-to-end visibility for the customer throughout the repair process via their communication medium of choice – whether it is telephonically, via SMS, WhatsApp or e-mail.

FMCSA has also implemented an automated alert system that identifies any vehicles that have been in for repairs at a Ford dealer for more than a certain number of days. “Having a vehicle off the road is a significant inconvenience for any customer, so the alert system brings this to our attention and enables us to quickly and effectively assist the dealer in resolving any repair or outstanding parts issues,” Smith says. “Our Customer Support Centre engages with the customer directly to update them regularly on the progress, and assist with a loan vehicle if required.”

An additional tool developed by Ford’s CX team in South Africa is an integrated online case management system that provides an easy way for dealers to manage and update open cases. It feeds into a central management system, and measures the dealer timeliness for closing cases, provides proactive dealer notifications on new cases, follow-up e-mails for delinquent cases and weekly reporting to dealer principals.

The pilot phase of the Ranger Support Team has already achieved significant success, despite initially being limited to 16 dealers covering the major centres. “Within two months of launching this initiative in July, we reduced the average number of days affected Ranger customers were without their vehicles by 65 percent,” Smith points out.

“We hope to roll the learnings from this project out across the network of more than 140 Ford dealers over the next year, focusing on those dealers that receive and work on the highest number of tow-ins first, and ultimately to expand this approach to all of our vehicles in the future. That way, we will reach more customers faster as we continue to strive for the highest level of customer satisfaction, and seek to deliver an exceptional customer experience with the Ford brand,” Smith concludes.

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| **Contact:** | Dudu Nxele |
|  | Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa+27 12 842 2337 |
|  | dnxele@ford.com |