

Q&A with Mercedes-Benz's Selvin Govender

 By Naresh Maharaj

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Last month Mercedes-Benz South Africa announced that its head of marketing and sales, Selvin Govender, has taken over the position of vice president and director for marketing and sales for Mercedes-Benz GDs Europe, Middle East and Africa. I caught up with Govender to find out more about his new role, his thoughts on emerging auto-tech, and how the chip shortage crisis has affected Mercedes-Benz.



Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East vice-president and director for marketing and sales Selvin Govender | image supplied

🔸 ***Congrats on your new appointment. What will the new position entail?***

The new position is that of vice-president and director for marketing and sales at Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East. In addition, I will also be responsible for some central and Eastern European countries, some African countries, and a few Latin American countries.

🔸 ***How does this differ from your previous duties?***

In some ways, it is very similar in that I would still need to help create awareness of the brand, products, features and technologies, as well as the intent and consideration for purchase.

However, in addition, I will have to steer these processes in many diverse countries across the globe. Centralisation in terms of marketing, web platforms, and e-commerce that could help reduce the cost of retail and improvement in competitiveness is an important criterion for success.

🔸 ***You are well known as Mr Mercedes. Tell us briefly about your career and how you have evolved into this position***

I have been really blessed to find a home at Mercedes-Benz. The company has allowed me to experience many different careers in the automotive space providing me with a solid knowledge base from which to operate. This combined with a

dedication to lifelong learning has helped get me to where I am today.

Early in my career, I was responsible for the remarketing function for Mercedes-Benz. I grew this portfolio to include the Mercedes-Benz certified pre-owned business and then added fleet and residual value management to my portfolio.

I then transitioned to head of sales for new cars. For the last decade, I was appointed as marketing director, successfully leading the transition of the brand from traditional to digital marketing. Recently, Mercedes-Benz combined the sales and marketing portfolios, and I was appointed vice president of the division, a position I currently hold.

■ ***How have Covid-19, chip shortages, and stock shortages affected the Merc brand and motoring in general?***

Following the onset of the pandemic, most economists predicted that South Africa would experience an L-shaped Covid-19 recovery curve.

This meant that we would have a steep decline into a recessionary economy, with pre-Covid economic levels being achieved in only three to four years. We are currently seeing this play out in the broader economy as well as in the automotive industry.

The recovery, which at times could have been faster, was further hamstrung by component shortages arising out of the Shanghai lockdown, logistics challenges as the global shipping crisis that continues to impact supply chains around the world. Against these pressures, the Mercedes-Benz brand remains as strong as ever and demand is at an all-time high. However, we have not managed to maintain the growth rate we had planned due to the above-listed challenges.

■ ***Passenger vehicles are becoming more sophisticated. Where are we heading as far as AI, driverless cars and electric vehicles are concerned?***

I believe that new technologies in the automotive space will certainly help to reduce the number of accidents, injuries and fatalities on our roads. Imagine a future where you are transported serenely and safely, with no quarrelling or rise in blood pressure – this for me is utopia. Moreover, it is not in the distant future; it is within reach.

Electric vehicles are here whether we think now is the time is right or not. For the premium segment, demand remains high. Customers in this segment have already invested in renewable technologies, with solar power being the main one.



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The ride in an electric car is phenomenal; the thrill that comes from immediate power delivery is indescribable. A point to consider is that in the most efficient internal combustion engines (from Mercedes-Benz, of course), 60% of the power

generated by the engine reaches the wheels, whereas, in our EQ vehicles, 100% of the power from the battery reaches the wheels, with zero emissions.

🚦 **What does a typical day in the life of S G entail?**

Robin Sharma's *The 5 AM Club* gets me going in the morning, followed by a 5km walk or jog with our dog. Then it is meetings, meetings and more meetings.

The job of leadership is to provide clarity and direction – and I have to be available for my team, partners and suppliers. I am always on and need to respond immediately or be responded to in the same timeframe. Launches of new products and technologies, sponsorship events to showcase the brand and local and international travel are a welcome distraction in a high-powered corporate environment.



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Hiking, park runs, golf, travel and reading are the pleasures I enjoy the most.

🚦 **If you could change one thing in the motoring industry in SA at the moment, what would that be?**

The automotive sector in SA is a big contributor to employment and GDP. As our biggest export markets experience pressure under stringent emissions regulations, it is a given fact that ICE-powered vehicles will be phased out within the decade in some of these markets, and with it, our reason to exist.

My wish for the SA motor industry is that we are able to evolve and take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new technologies, to help shape policy and investment into the sector, but mainly, not to diminish the scope and scale of this critically important industry.

ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

Naresh Maharaj is a petrol head who loves cars and writing about them. He is also a Member of the SA Guild of Motoring Journalists. Naresh is also an international sports correspondent and an acclaimed corporate MC and voice-over artist. Naresh is a sports/news producer for community radio stations and also an award-winning sports journalist. Contact Naresh on nmaharaj321@gmail.com

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