



Some Canadians
have elevated
adaptation
to an art form

2021 CANADIANS TO WATCH

THE FOURTH ANNUAL **CANADIANS TO WATCH** recognizes key players, influencers and rising stars across the spectrum of the Canadian auto industry. There are certainly many more Canadians to watch, but the stories of the individuals selected for the 2021 edition provide a glimpse of the creativity and energy devoted to an industry that's in a constant state of dramatic technological change. The last year, in particular, has been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a transformative work-from-home culture, the shift to electric vehicles and consumers who have grown even more accustomed to shopping from their electronic devices.



Accelerating a diverse industry

JENNIFER OKOEGUALE

Consultant, Major Events, Toyota Canada

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Jennifer Okoeguale never considered a career in automotive until a job listing at Toyota Canada appeared on her radar. “I’m not a nuts-and-bolts person, I don’t know how a car works, am I ever going to fit in?” she recalls asking herself. Nobody’s asking whether she fits in anymore.

Okoeguale, 28, started in corporate com-

munications in 2017 and moved to her current role as consultant in major events in August 2020. Along the way, she developed a reputation for being a powerful advocate for racial diversity across the automotive industry. In the aftermath of the murder last year of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Okoeguale decided more needed to be done to promote diversity across the industry. She lobbied Toyota Canada executives, who gave her the green light to become one of the automaker’s leading ambassadors for diversity. She’s changing how Toyota communicates with diverse communities. And

as one of the founders of Accelerate Auto, a new nonprofit aimed at improving diversity in the industry, she’s helping encourage other people of colour who, such as herself, might never have considered a career in automotive.

IN HER OWN WORDS:

“I was very nervous going out with [Accelerate Auto]. I was not sure how receptive the industry would be, but I had a moment of personal reflection — ‘Will this affect my career?’ The second I started questioning that, I knew it was the right path. It has not been a risk at all. The leaders have stepped up. They’ve seen the need for Accelerate Auto.”

Driver-assist leader senses a new direction

FRANTZ SAINTELLEMY

COO, LeddarTech

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Frantz Saintelley, 47, is COO of Quebec-based LeddarTech at a crucial moment for the industry and for the advanced driver-assistance system (ADAS) company. For a big chunk of 2020, the pandemic largely paused much of the industry’s development and testing of ADAS technology.

But things have been heating up, and LeddarTech sees itself leading this resurgence. Saintelley is helping guide the company as it looks to address the diverse needs of its customers. Some automakers are looking for an incremental approach to adopting ADAS technology while others want to make huge leaps forward in short periods of time. “It forces us to really be at the forefront of problems to solve,” Saintelley said.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

“We think we can be one of the companies that can help consolidate the industry. In the last year, we have done two acquisitions — one in Israel, one in Canada. The pandemic got rid of a lot of the noise around autonomous driving,

around lidar, to focus on ADAS and advanced autonomy features and pushing out [autonomous vehicles] to a more realistic timeline.”



For target marketing, her aim is true

JENNIFER SONGVILAY

Manager, Digital Marketing and Social Media, Hyundai Auto Canada Corp.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Jennifer Songvilay is constantly looking for new ways to reach potential Hyundai buyers through digital and social media campaigns that resonate with their specific interests, such as mountain biking or motorsports.

“It’s about reaching the right audience at the right time with the right message,” said Songvilay, 35. “I think that makes a huge difference versus just blasting everyone with an ad.”

To reach her target audience, Songvilay often partners with online influencers, such as Calgary professional snowboarder Leanne Pelosi or Toronto’s YouTube cinematographer Peter

McKinnon, to develop online campaigns they disseminate through their own social media channels.

Songvilay, a graduate of Ryerson University with a bachelor’s degree in hospitality and tourism marketing, joined Hyundai in 2017 as digital marketing coordinator. By using the wealth of available data on consumers’ habits and interests, her team developed a more targeted online strategy that generated better results at a lower cost, Songvilay said.

IN HER OWN WORDS:

“If you have an effective message or creative that’s relevant to the consumer, it will resonate with them more and they will more likely take an action. And that action will drive a conversion, which will then result in greater cost efficiencies for media investments.”

Engineer is a ‘best-in-class’ act

PARAN HILBI

Resident Engineering Lead, Stellantis

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

In five years with FCA/Stellantis, engineer Paran Hilbi, 31, has progressed from data analyst to a resident engineering lead in charge of the 2021 Chrysler Pacifica refresh and all-wheel-drive launch. Steering a staff of more than 25 plant vehicle engineers for the Pacifica refresh, she tracked all engineering issues to resolution.

An expert in manufacturing quality engineering, Hilbi challenges her team to be “best in class.” She developed “a team of leaders,” and she co-leads the co-op program with the University of Windsor, which in turn has resulted in numerous graduates being hired by Stellantis.



IN HER OWN WORDS:

“It’s an honour to have been a part of the first-ever hybrid minivan launch in 2017, and the 2021 Chrysler Pacifica refresh and AWD launch. My vision is to continue to demonstrate resilience as I develop myself along with developing the strongest and high-performing cross-functional team.

“My goal is to utilize passion as a lever to help the team do their jobs better, set clear expectations, drive collaboration through respect, reinforce positive behaviors and drive results.”

In the EV era, he’s focused on customers

VITO PALADINO

President, Audi Canada

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

In just seven years at Audi Canada, Vito Paladino has risen through the ranks, assuming the top spot in 2020. Throughout his career, the auto industry has always had an “innovative lens from a product

standpoint,” said Paladino, 44.

Audi’s biggest challenge moving forward is maintaining a continual focus on balancing strong sales performance with aggressively planning to be a premium leader in an industry undergoing seismic technological change, Paladino says.

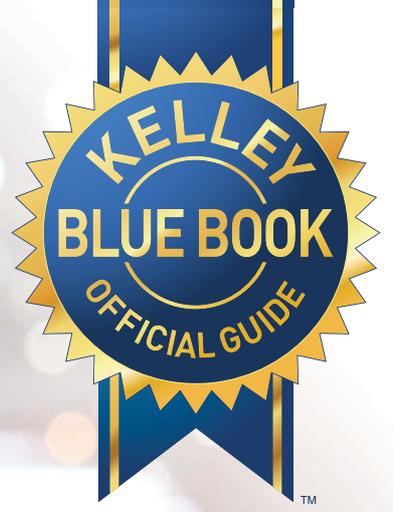
Starting in 2026, the Germany-based luxury brand says it will launch new electric models only. But customers, he said, must remain at the centre of every key

decision that’s made at both the automaker and dealership level.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

“The key to ensure a smooth transition is to continue to be customer-centric from a corporate and dealership perspective, which will position us in the centre of the customer journey. A customer-first mindset within our communications, training, customer consultations and digital platforms will support the transition of our employees, dealers and customers to the world of e-mobility and autonomous driving.”





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The power for a 'megabattery' factory



SOROSH NAZARPOUR
CEO, NanoXplore Inc.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Sorosh Nazarpour, 36, leads NanoXplore Inc., a Quebec-based supplier of a substance — graphene powder — that could make electric vehicles more efficient and lead to their mass adoption. Despite being incredibly thin, graphene is stronger than steel and more conductive than copper, and it will not break down at high temperatures. Those properties could make it an ideal material for EV batteries, helping



reduce charging times and allowing EVs to go farther on a charge — addressing two key areas of concern among Canadian consumers.

This year, NanoXplore formed a joint venture with Ontario supplier Martinrea International Inc. to prove graphene's potential for EV batteries. If the JV, dubbed VoltaXplore, is successful, Martinrea and NanoXplore have signaled interest in opening Canada's first "megabattery factory."



IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"There are a lot of good technologies out there, but they are either not scalable or they're expensive and people really don't use them. Graphene is something that can actually change the way people live. It impacts multiple industries. It's a very strategic material. And for us, the mission was to make it accessible to pretty much everybody. Let's bring the price down and bring the volume to scale."



Rolls exec plays a new role for a brand looking for separation

MATTHEW WILSON

General Manager, Canada
Rolls-Royce Motor Cars

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Matthew Wilson, 43, started as Rolls-Royce Motor Cars' Canada-based general manager in February, putting an executive in charge of the Great White North for the first time in the carmaker's 116-year history. It's a significant step for a company that typically sells a bit more than 100 ultraluxury cars a year in Canada. Rolls-Royce sells 3,000 to 5,000 vehicles a year, globally.

Why the change? It was time for the brand to carve out an identity in Canada separate from that of the United States. For Wilson — who previously was national manager of product plan-

ning for the Canadian operations of Rolls-Royce's parent, BMW — the move requires rethinking how to run a car company.

Catering to clients who demand a bespoke car that is uniquely theirs — and pay as much as a 40 per cent premium over the suggested retail price — requires a single-minded focus on the relationship and the understanding of what the client wants, and then seeing that vision through to completion with the factory in Goodwood, England, Wilson said.



IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"As soon as I saw this [job], I knew it was the right opportunity for me. This was the biggest shift, not like anything I expected. I feel like I've left the industry, left the group, because the business model is so different."

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Canadians To Watch 2021

CONGRATULATIONS, FRANTZ!
- Charles Boulanger, CEO of LeddarTech

Her incentive strategy: Making women matter

JESSICA TODD

Senior Manager, Incentives
Strategy
Hyundai Auto Canada Corp.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

For Jessica Todd, two key accomplishments are a source of immense pride. Since being promoted to senior manager of incentives strategy in 2018, she has overseen a decrease in Hyundai's incentives spending by almost 50 per cent. She also set a personal goal two years ago of making the automaker a better place to work for women. Together with a colleague, she started a resource group called Women at HACC (Hyundai Auto Canada Corp.) to raise awareness of the challenges women face in a male-dominated industry.

"There have been countless times in a meeting where I've been the only woman in the room," said Todd, 35. "A lot of times,

I felt like my voice wasn't able to be heard. I was just talked over by the men at the table."

The resource group has hosted companywide gender-equity conferences, given talks at universities aimed at persuading more women to consider a career in the auto industry, and encouraged men to join their group as allies. The result has been an increase in the percentage of women working at Hyundai Canada to 35 per cent from 30 per cent. The company has also been certified as a Great Place to Work for Women based on confidential employee surveys, Todd said.



IN HER OWN WORDS:

"It doesn't matter that you're a woman in a male-dominated industry. You have the ability to do anything a man can do in this industry."





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Engineer guides GM's Super Cruise control

PHILIP ASANTE

Senior DevOps Engineer,
General Motors

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Philip Asante, 32, is part of a growing team at General Motors that's developing the infrastructure for the automaker's Super Cruise advanced driver-assist system, which debuted in 2017 and is expected to be on 22 vehicles by 2023.

Asante joined GM in 2018 after beginning his career at aerospace companies such as Lockheed Martin. He and his team are responsible for bringing together the hardware and software components needed for Super Cruise to function.

GM is investing heavily in new technologies, and for Asante and his team, "The sky is the limit, literally."

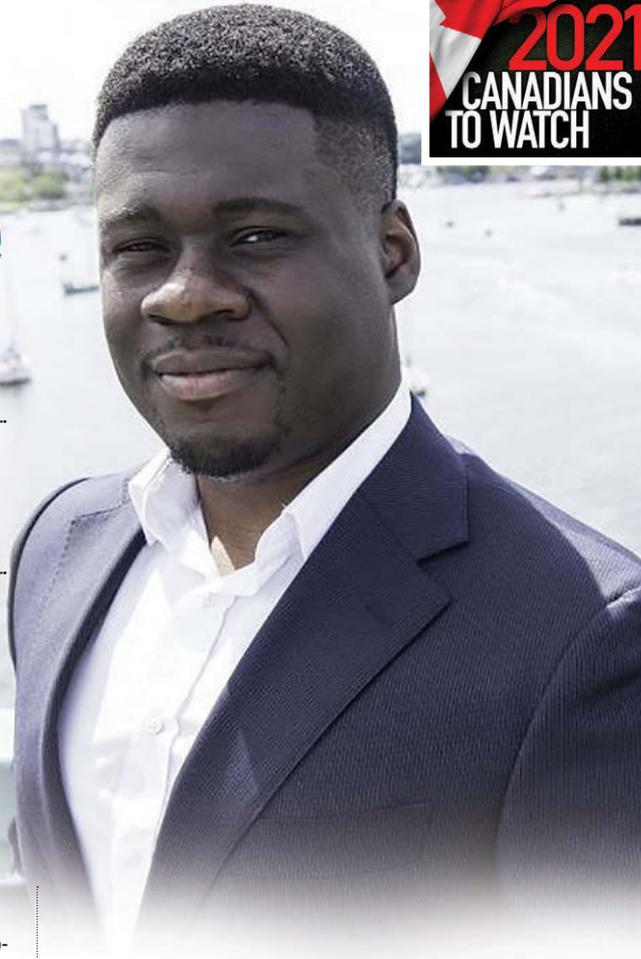


IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"If we are able to expand this active safety and autonomous suite and eventually get to a point where we no longer need a person

to be driving the vehicle, just imagine how that would change our lives.

"You no longer need a driver's licence. You might not need to have multiple cars if you have multiple individuals in your household. You could share the car and go to work and have your car go drop your kids off at school. It's an area that will help reduce congestion."



Building a future for Oshawa plant

JACQUELINE THOMSON

General Assembly Area
Manager, Oshawa Assembly,
General Motors

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Jacqueline Thomson, 45, is the first female general-assembly-area manager in the history of General Motors Canada, helping prepare Oshawa Assembly for the return of vehicle production after the plant was idled in late 2019.

Thomson, a 21-year veteran of GM Canada, had previous roles in corporate communications, labour relations and human resources. Now she spends much of her time working on plant layouts, safety planning and helping bring in new hires.

After GM announced late last year a \$1.3-billion investment in the facility, Oshawa is set to produce full-size pickups starting in the fourth quarter. GM calls



it one of the fastest plant launches in its history.



IN HER OWN WORDS:

"I know the industry has transformed, and we've gone through different things in lieu of that, but to me there's such a pride within the Oshawa team. I'm ecstatic to be back and a part of it. ... It's like a rebirth."

A legal leader, be it trade or pandemic

ZAHAR ORLOV

Executive Legal Director,
Martinrea International Inc.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

From working on mergers and learning new trade rules, to navigating constantly shifting pandemic regulations, Zahar Orlov, 37, has been critical in helping Martinrea International sort through major issues. As the auto supplier's executive legal director, he has worked with the company's executives and other industry voices on the implementation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. When questions arose over how to count labour toward the USMCA's requirements, Orlov and other Martinrea executives gave government officials a tour of the company's operations to show how a modern plant works.

Since last year, Orlov has helped Martinrea sort through constantly shifting COVID-19 rules and regulations around the world.

"It's been a fascinating time to practice law," he said.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"I don't think there's ever been a time — and there probably won't be a time again in my lifetime — where laws change that frequently. Typically, a law changes once in a blue moon. Here, you wake up and it's like, what happened? You can't travel here, you can't operate there, but you can operate here with exclusions. It has been a lot of work, but it has been a very fascinating time. Hopefully, we're at the end of it."



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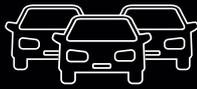
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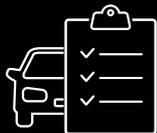
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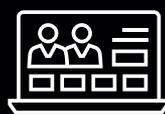
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True grit translates into sales success

TANYA VAN DONGEN

Sales and Leasing, Rose City Ford, Windsor, Ont.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Being a young woman in a largely male-dominated profession has been no obstacle for Tanya Van Dongen. The 26-year-old sales and leasing employee at Rose City Ford in Windsor, Ont., has been a top one-percentile performer on the AutoCanada Inc.'s Chairman's List for the last two years.

It's quite a feat for Van Dongen, who joined Rose City Ford about four years ago. Born and raised in an automotive family, she had initially planned to become a lawyer, but decided to give selling cars a try to earn extra money.

"In the first month I didn't think it [sales] was for me; in the second month, I got to the top of the [sales] board," where she has stayed since.



IN HER OWN WORDS:

"It has been challenging to be not just female but young and successful, but I would encourage other young women to enter [the business]. You've got to have grit, a strong will and a strong head. I came into the industry to challenge perceptions. Much of my success has come through repeat customers and referrals, the biggest compliments for a salesperson ever."

He's plugging away at buyer acceptance

CHRISTOPHER NABETA

National Manager, Fleet CPO and Remarketing, Volvo Car Canada

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Christopher Nabeta's current role at Volvo is helping pave the way to a plug-in future. The automaker is steadily boosting its electrified powertrains, but customers must want to buy them.

Nabeta, 37, is working to expand buyer acceptance by integrating electric vehicles into Volvo's fleet and rental channels. The idea is to get more drivers behind the wheel and help make the ownership process similar to that of conventional cars.

Nabeta worked in customer service and dealer retail before joining Volvo in 2020. There he has used his knowledge of customer behaviour to help tailor programs for EVs, including charging and roadside assistance. Remarketing EVs also presents issues such as vehicle valuation and consumer concerns over battery life, Nabeta said. The challenge is figuring out an EV's future worth, and convincing buyers that the battery on a used vehicle is going to last, he said.



IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"With remarketing, I take a holistic approach in supporting the company by working with all our departments. We look at marketing, customer experience, service, facilities and financial services to build brand equity, including with electrification. Eventually, every [internal combustion vehicle] will be replaced by an electrified vehicle, and the company that understands its customers and offers the best solutions will have the lion's share of that customer base."



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With sedan market stalled, she drives Sentra success

JENNIFER LUONG

Senior Manager, Chief Marketing Management, Nissan Canada Inc.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Jennifer Luong, 28, has been instrumental in boosting market share for the new Nissan Sentra at a time when consumer appetite is heavily weighted toward crossovers, SUVs and pickups. Successes in customer service and incentives at Infiniti led Luong to Nissan Canada's marketing office, where she manages crossovers and passenger cars. She spent three-and-a-half years in the field as a fixed-operations manager, working directly with dealerships across southwestern Ontario, and as a dealer operations manager "engaging our deal-

ers as business partners." In her most recent role as senior manager of chief marketing management, Luong led the campaign for the new Sentra, "doubling the share from the outgoing model" to 4.8 per cent in March 2020 from 2.4 per cent in April 2019.



IN HER OWN WORDS:

"I call myself a business consultant working directly with dealers, looking for areas of opportunity to expand, best practices and accessing more business. It is important to be the best version of yourself, ... be a positive force, to pay forward what I have learned through mentoring and networking. By keeping the customer in mind, whatever you produce should resonate with the customer."



EV ambitions put a jolt in VW product planner

PATRICK DANIELSON

Director, Product Planning, Volkswagen Group Canada Ltd.

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

After less than two years at Volkswagen Canada, Patrick Danielson finds himself stickhandling two key challenges: VW's transformation to an electric-vehicle company; and ensuring that its product line meets the preferences of Canadian consumers.



His role is particularly pressing in light of this summer's launch of the all-electric ID.4 and new Taos into the fiercely competitive compact-crossover segment.

As Volkswagen works toward its goal of being completely carbon-neutral in every facet of its global operations by 2050, Danielson, 33, will be at the centre of the Canadian operation's efforts.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"Everything we do — from auto sales to our dealer network — ladders up from product planning. We are always lobbying on behalf of Canadian consumers in the way our cars are contented and priced. Everyone deserves to have a better car; that means we have to understand our customers and keep an eye on the future by predicting their needs and wants even before they know what they are."

Trail blazer trains brains

LAUREN TEDESCO

Vice-President, Learning and Development, Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association (APMA)

CHOSEN BECAUSE:

Lauren Tedesco is on the front lines of the "war for talent" in Canadian manufacturing. Her mission is to position the auto sector as one of the global leaders in technology and mobility by attracting and training the workforce of the future.

Tedesco, 36, is the first female vice-president in the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association's 70-year history. She oversees the workforce-development programs and policy for the auto-supplier sector.

She is currently building the first industrywide digital learning program, designed to address the shortage of skilled trades. The program is set to launch this year and will offer courses in areas such as health and safety, lean manufacturing, quality assurance and leadership. The aim is

to allow established workers to gain skills at their own pace, with the program forecast to train as many as 5,000 workers in the first year.

IN HER OWN WORDS:

"I joke it's the Netflix of training. You go online and pick your courses. There are assignments to complete, and then there's an algorithm — you took these types of courses; here are other ones you might be interested in. So there's a push on the platform to move people along so they can look at the career-development piece rather than just training in the role that they're currently in. With upskilling, training and being able to attract new talent, people can really be thoughtful about what the future of their company looks like, the future of the industry looks like and be a bit more strategic, which ultimately makes us more competitive as an auto sector." — **ANC**



Jennifer Luong
Senior Manager, Chief Marketing Management

NISSAN

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on being named one of Automotive News' **Canadians to Watch!**

For the second year in a row, Nissan Canada has been certified as a Great Place to Work. Even in a period of change in the industry, we have remained focused on inclusion and creating a highly collaborative culture that is committed to fostering new and exciting opportunities for our employees.

