

AUTOMOTIVE

Luxury automakers set sights on new Saudi Arabian drivers

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A controversial ban on female drivers in Saudi Arabia has ended. Image credit: Audi

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As Saudi Arabia officially ends its longtime ban on female drivers, luxury automakers have been among the first to welcome women to the driver's seat.

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Since the end of the driving ban was announced last fall, auto manufacturers have had time to evaluate how they will market to changing demographics of Saudi Arabian drivers. Audi, Jaguar and Ford were among the automakers that released short films commemorating the historic occasion on Sunday, June 24.

"Automakers have been targeting Saudi women since the ban's end was announced in September, so advertisers will need to separate themselves from the others in order to be effective," said Julie Blackley, communications manager at [iSeeCars](#), Woburn, MA.

Saudi women drive

British automaker Jaguar Land Rover partnered with entrepreneur and motorsport driver Aseel Al Hamad to celebrate what the brand is dubbing "World Driving Day."

The short film begins with Ms. Al Hamad interviewed in the back seat of a Jaguar as she is being driven to a racetrack. She reminisces about her passion for cars from a young age.

While Ms. Al Hamad has driven on racetracks around the world, her drive in the Jaguar F-Type was the first time she had been in the driver's seat in her native nation. The music swells as she takes the wheel of the sports car and drives around the track under a World Driving Day banner.

Jaguar Land Rover commemorated the end of Saudi Arabia's driving ban on women. Credit: Jaguar

German automaker Audi took a more universal approach with its video campaign. It opens with a man and woman preparing for their day. As they leave their home, the man goes out of his way to open several doors for the woman.

When they approach their Audi, however, the woman insists on opening the passenger side door for the man a deviation from their traditional routine. She calmly then goes to the driver's side, sits in the driver's seat and grips the steering wheel.

Audi celebrates the lift on female drivers in Saudi Arabia.

U.S.-based Ford Motor Company, parent company of Lincoln, also released a short film honoring Saudi Arabian women.

An inspirational voiceover narrates as Saudi women stand in front of Ford vehicles. Different natural and urban landscapes from Saudi Arabia are also included in the short.



Lincoln is putting Middle Eastern women at the forefront of their marketing in the region. Image credit: Lincoln

The automotive group also collaborated with Saudi automotive influencer Hasan Kutbi to share advice specifically geared towards first-time female car buyers in the kingdom.

In light of the ban ending, *Vogue Arabia's* June 2018 issue was dedicated to Saudi Arabia. HRH Hayfa bint Abdullah Al Saud is pictured on the cover in a vintage Mercedes-Benz convertible.

Changing course

Ending the driving ban on women in Saudi Arabia is likely to have a widespread impact, and luxury brands stand to gain as the Middle Eastern country becomes less stringent.

Although Saudi Arabia has previously been open to business travel and religious pilgrimages, visiting for pleasure has never been an option. However, the Middle Eastern destination will be opened up to tourists through a new visa that extends to leisure travelers.

The country is already home to a series of five-star hotels from brands such as Four Seasons, The Ritz-Carlton, Rosewood and InterContinental ([see story](#)).

Despite altering their marketing focus to accommodate new women drivers, auto manufacturers may have to wait before there is any notable difference in the Saudi Arabian auto market.

Women make up only a fraction of the workforce and their average income is dwarfed by men, making it far less likely that they will be able to afford a car on their own. Some of this may be alleviated by the end of the ban, as critics have long said that one of the biggest effects of the ban is causing women to sink up to half their income on taking taxis everywhere ([see story](#)).

"It is estimated that there will be 3 million new women drivers in Saudi Arabia by 2020," iSeeCars' Ms. Blackley said. "Brands benefit by attracting these potential new car buyers through advertising, while also displaying corporate social responsibility by celebrating gender equality."