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# ŠKODA Chief Designer Jozef Kabaň: "Aesthetics and functionality combined"

- › ŠKODA Chief Designer and Red Dot Award boss Prof. Dr. Peter Zec in an interview on the purpose and function of design
- › Design plays an increasingly important role in differentiating products

**Florence/Mladá Boleslav, 26 June 2015 – Design is becoming increasingly important in the automotive sector. This was the conclusion of ŠKODA's Chief Designer Jozef Kabaň and Prof. Dr. Peter Zec, initiator and head of the prestigious Red Dot Design Award, in a joint interview with ŠKODA customer magazine 'Extratour'.**

"Whenever the technology of various providers advances together, it is design that makes the difference," says Jozef Kabaň. "A good car, however, will always provide a combination of different characteristics: the balance has to be right."

According to Prof. Dr. Zec, research supports the growing importance of design in the car industry. "Studies show that between 80 and 85 percent of the purchasing decisions in the automotive sector depend on the car's design. Customers switch brands if they no longer like the design."

In this context, Jozef Kabaň commented that it is becoming increasingly important for design not only to fulfil the rational aspects, but should also be emotionally appealing. "Nowadays, everyday objects are not only looked at as functional, but they are also viewed with emotion. The creative realisation of emotions increases in importance and influences purchasing decisions."

ŠKODA designers keep this in mind in developing new models. "Cars from ŠKODA will also in the future set themselves apart from the competition thanks to their convincing balance between functionality and aesthetics", explains Kabaň. "My dream is just to combine the most beautiful aesthetics with maximum functionality, to bring both of those together so that we don't speak of two separate things any more. Design makes functionality attractive."

In Zec's opinion, ŠKODA has struck this balance with their current models. The new ŠKODA Fabia "holds an incredibly dynamic view" and "the space is outstanding". On the new ŠKODA Superb, Zec said, "The Superb has a great silhouette and is a wonderful car".

The interview with Jozef Kabaň and Peter Zec was conducted as part of the dynamic vehicle presentation of the new ŠKODA Superb in Florence. You can find the complete interview on the following pages.



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**Prof. Dr. Zec, let us come straight to the point. Can you tell us what it was about the new Fabia that wowed the Red Dot jury?**

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** First of all, it is important to note that the Red Dot jurors have extensive experience when it comes to car design. Therefore, they naturally have a good eye for a good signature design, not only with regards to eye-catching cars. With the Fabia, it is the lines: its silhouette is clean and neat, the lines run parallel. There are no frills, no wrong curves. The car holds an incredibly dynamic view. And what was particularly convincing: when you get in and see the interior... the space is outstanding. All of that together was assessed and – I believe, quite rightly – awarded with the Red Dot.

**Would you say that good design is inevitably required to be suitable for the mass market?**

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** There are studies demonstrating that when making a buying decision, particularly in the automotive market, between 80 and 85 per cent is based on the car's design. Also when 'brand loyalty' and 'design' are compared, design wins out. In other words, customers switch brands when they don't like the design any more.

**Why are customers not involved with Red Dot? Aren't designers judging designers without thinking of the customer who is, in the end, going to be using the product?**

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** The history of this award must be taken into consideration. Effectively, the award was founded by designers for designers, as often the following is the case: products are designed, and if they are successful, the success is attributed to great marketing, and super pricing. And product development did a good job. But design is irrelevant. But if a product isn't successful, then the design was wrong. Against this background, at the time it was a kind of 'designers' self-help'. They wanted to have the quality of work evaluated. For that you need experts.

**Mr. Kabaň, how much 'customer' is put into your design?**

**Jozef Kabaň:** A lot and a little at the same time. We have to be mindful not to ask too much of the customer. The customer doesn't have an easy task: it takes time for design to be accepted. Sometimes only the experts can recognise the potential. For the consumer, this may be more difficult at first glance. An example: we never could have brought the internet into cars, if we had solely asked our customers. A few years ago, they didn't want it yet. I didn't know myself that I would need mobile internet. Nowadays, I'm constantly with my mobile phone when I'm on the move. I have 'the entire office' with me at all times. Had someone asked me 20 years ago, I probably wouldn't have considered this development possible. New things take time.

**In other words, design is also a matter of education? Or is there something along the lines of a universally valid design?**



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**Jozef Kabaň:** Of course, designers work to some extent ahead of time. They simultaneously turn visions and emotions into a reality. Man has always tried to transform his emotions into sheet metal or other things. And by doing so, providing the material with additional value. Or not, as the case may be. In the past, that occurred most of all in art, in paintings, sculptures. That was pure emotion. Nowadays, everyday objects are not only looked at as functional objects, but they are also viewed with emotion. Because, ultimately, it is much nicer when something that I use functions perfectly, and on top of that I can also enjoy it. The creative realisation of emotions increases in importance and influences purchasing decisions. At ŠKODA, we are perfectly aware of that.

***Speaking of functionality: ŠKODA was and is famous for building very functional cars. Is ŠKODA now turning into a designer brand?***

**Jozef Kabaň:** No, we are not planning on becoming a designer brand, and I think that is a good thing. My dream is just to combine the most beautiful aesthetics with maximum functionality, to bring both of those together so that we don't speak of two separate things any more. We are attempting to find beauty in simplicity, without disregarding functionality, ergonomics and safety. Because a car should, in the first instance, fulfil its purpose. There are so many requirements in a car that are considerably more important than design. Design makes functionality attractive.

***If design takes time to be accepted by the customer, why can't the customer educate the designers, by telling them what they want and what makes them happy?***

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** It takes a very long time to change people's habits. For that reason, the biggest challenge with products as expensive as cars which have long development cycles, is to balance tradition with innovation. In other words, if you are too innovative, you lose the brand. You can't assign the cars any more. But if you are too traditional, the cars are boring.

**Jozef Kabaň:** You must know your customers, know what steps they are willing to take to go along with you. If you overdo the innovation, you lose these customers. If you downplay it, you will also lose them. Perhaps not today, but tomorrow.

***As you said, a car has to fulfil many functions, design is one of those. Qualitatively and technologically, the field is moving ever closer together. In your view, will the design therefore further increase in importance?***

**Jozef Kabaň:** I believe design is key. Because: if technology moves closer together, it will be the design that differentiates things. But it is not the design alone, but the combination of everything that constitutes a good car. Alongside technology, there is space, there is the ergonomics, the materials that you choose. As Prof. Zec said, the balance has to be right. You can overload a car with design or with technology. From a ŠKODA perspective, I would say: a car should not turn into the focal point of life. But it is and remains a distinguishing feature. With their car, people also reveal something about themselves. Take the new Superb: as the flagship of the ŠKODA brand, it has among other things the task of providing the driver – and also the brand – with more self-



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assurance. It is not only rationality that they choose, but also aesthetic added value. The Superb also has a representative function. It is not a premium car, but it must radiate self-assurance and charisma next to the premium brands.

### ***Professor Zec, if the choice of car does indeed say something about the driver, which attributes do you associate with the driver of a Superb?***

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** A solid person who knows how to appreciate technical quality and aesthetics. Someone understated who doesn't overdo things.

### ***What are the elements that represent the 'look' of all ŠKODA vehicles and that we can count on also in the future?***

**Jozef Kabaň:** It is important not to tie ourselves down too much to one thing. But despite that, I expect us designers to define dreams. I need to know the direction we're heading in. The strongest car with a full tank doesn't help me if I don't know where to go. Cars from ŠKODA will also in the future set themselves apart from the competition thanks to their convincing balance between functionality and aesthetics. An important design feature of our products is, for example, the vertical grille which we will certainly retain. It combines the tradition and future of our brand. Another example is the headlights used in our cars, with which we would rather establish an association with the human eye than with the technology itself. When you look at a ŠKODA, you should have the feeling of looking into a person's eyes rather than looking at a high-tech product. The mindset of our brand is very close to the mindset of people.

### ***Are there studies showing to what extent an award such as the Red Dot influences consumer buying behaviour?***

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** We can't quantify it exactly. But: if you look at the industries represented with us, then you would probably be very surprised that bath tubs have such a great need for a design award. In particularly saturated markets, such an award can make all the difference. Also when it comes to mobile phones and laptops. Here there is tremendous comparability and tremendous competition. Given that, the manufacturers use the Red Dot label accordingly. Therefore anywhere where another particular selling point is needed. With products that become popular anyway because they have the market to themselves, it is more important for the designers to receive the accolade.

### ***Mr Kabaň, how important is it for you, as a responsible designer, to receive such an award?***

**Jozef Kabaň:** Of course it wasn't our primary aim. Our primary aim is to attract as many people as possible to the ŠKODA brand with our products. Despite that, awards such as the Red Dot are very important to us designers. What is better than recognition from our customers and our colleagues. The bar is set very high with Red Dot. The jury is highly qualified. To win a Red Dot is very motivating for every designer.

### ***Have you already submitted an application with the Superb?***

**Jozef Kabaň:** Not yet, but hopefully nothing will stand in the way of that.



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## **Professor Zec, what do you think: Is the new ŠKODA Superb worthy of a Red Dot?**

**Prof. Dr. Zec:** I very much hope that ŠKODA will submit an application for a Red Dot with the new Superb. The Superb has a great silhouette and is a wonderful car. But I am not a member of the jury, and you will certainly understand that I would not wish to influence the judgement of my colleagues in any way.

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### **ŠKODA Chief Designer Jozef Kabaň: "Aesthetics and functionality combined"**

ŠKODA Chief Designer and Red Dot Award boss Prof. Dr. Peter Zec talk about the purpose and function of design

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Quelle: ŠKODA AUTO



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## ŠKODA AUTO

- > is one of the longest-established vehicle production companies in the world. In 1895, the Czech headquarters in Mladá Boleslav began producing bicycles, followed by the production of motorbikes and cars.
- > currently offers the following models in the range: Citigo, Fabia, Roomster, Rapid, Octavia, Yeti and Superb.
- > in 2014 delivered more than 1 million vehicles to customers worldwide for the first time in a single year.
- > has belonged to Volkswagen since 1991. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful automotive groups in the world. ŠKODA, in association with the Group, independently manufactures and develops vehicles, as well as components, engines and gear transmissions.
- > operates at three locations in the Czech Republic, produces in China, Russia, Slovakia and India mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan through local partners.
- > employs over 25,900 people globally and is active in more than 100 markets.