



The Middle East. A land of car wash innovation and opportunities

The growing number of cars as well as the economic development of many of its countries has made the Middle East one of the most promising markets in the car wash industry. By 2020 there will be 60% more cars on the roads of Middle-Eastern countries, while annual light vehicle sales will reach over 4 million by that year. The territory's desert conditions and a strong luxury car market in the Gulf offer plenty of opportunities for car wash and car care providers.

After suffering the effects of collapsed crude oil prices, those countries in the Middle East which haven't been affected by the various armed conflicts can continue to embrace growth and development. The total number of cars in the Gulf countries is expected to reach 19.1 million by 2020, with Saudi Arabia accounting for the biggest share of the market (52.5%) and the United Arab Emirates for the second (18.5%), according to analysts Frost & Sullivan.

Three factors make the Gulf market specially interesting for car wash and car care professionals: The tough weather conditions of the desert along with extreme heat; the amount of new cars; and a strong luxury vehicle market. These are just some of reasons that explain the elevated number of washes that are carried out in the region.

In the UAE, where expatriates represent 88% of the population, non-Emirati residents get their car professionally cleaned three times a month on average, while Emiratis, generally wealthier, go to a car wash 5 times a month, according to a survey by VIS, the organisers of Middle East Cleaning Technology Week (MECTW).

The cost of getting a vehicle washed professionally in one the seven emirates than form the UAE ranges from Dh35 (\$9) to Dh 100 (\$27), according to Gulf News.

Mobile washing and the issue of water

In the desert lands of the Gulf water is a scarce and expensive resource. The price of water plus the environmentally-friendly vision of state governments has produced a surge in eco-efficient car wash techniques.

"Increases in water charges, coupled with sustainability initiatives by the government are encouraging car wash operators to embrace eco-efficient products and solutions," said Jayaraman

Nair, the chairman of VIS, to the Khaleej Times.

Car washing in public spaces is banned in the UAE with fines being imposed on offenders, opening more market space for professional car wash operators. These conditions have also allowed alternative car wash companies to significantly grow their business.

Geowash brought in the concept of waterless, mobile car washing in 2008. "In contrast to the 120-150 litres of water used by stationary car wash process per wash, we use an average of 3 litres per wash," said Bijith Bhaskaran, Chief Operating Officer. The company now operates over 45 premium locations in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Oxygen Car Wash, on their part, use a steam cleaning process which helps save up to 98% water. They distribute their machinery to mobile and station car washes.

For Prashant Nair, General Manager of MEOS, the biggest challenge facing the industry remains to be the general misconception about car wash machinery. "Today, the technology is so highly advanced that we can safely wash vehicles without any parts touching the body of the vehicles, thereby protecting the car," he said in an interview with Swaliha Shanavas.

With many people still relying on the infamous bucket wash and the number of cars in the Gulf countries growing by 7% a year, there are still plenty of opportunities for car wash, car care and detailing professionals. International car wash suppliers have the challenge of adapting their products to the extreme weather conditions, while local players will try to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

** The Gulf Car Wash-Car Care Expo has participated in this article. The next event will take place November 7 - 9, 2017 in the Dubai World Trade Centre.*