

Interview with Mr. Erik Jonnaert, ACEA's Secretary General

Erik Jonnaert is the Secretary General of the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA), which brings together the 15 major manufacturers of passenger cars, vans, trucks and buses with production in the EU.

- 1) **How do you see the trend for skills needs in the automotive sector in the coming years? And how is the automotive industry supporting and enforcing the uptake of these new skills through the value chain, namely SMEs?**

It is clear that mobility will be very different in the future, both from the vehicle side as well as the perspective of the user. Europe's automobile industry is moving towards new levels of mobility that are increasingly cleaner, safer and more connected. Auto manufacturers, such as ACEA's member companies, are evolving from being 'just' producers of motor vehicles to becoming providers of innovative mobility services.



This includes completely new models of transportation, with the concept of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) being the main driver. The vehicles themselves are also gradually being equipped with automated driving features as well as being connected with other vehicles and the infrastructure around them. At the same time, our members are expanding their offer of low- and zero-emission vehicles with alternative powertrains, such as electric and hybrid cars. This will contribute to further reducing CO₂ emissions from transport.

Evidently, both digitalisation and decarbonisation will also have an impact on the skills required from the workforce that is employed by auto manufacturers and their suppliers. And that is exactly why ACEA is involved in the DRIVES project. We want to help identify the skills and competences needed across the wider automotive supply chain in the future.

Indeed, it is important that we jointly analyse the disruptive trends transforming our industry, the skills needed in the future, as well as the gap between those future skills and the education provided today. In that regard, we are awaiting the results of the DRIVES study launched earlier this year, which will allow us to identify the required skills based on field research covering all project partners and relevant stakeholders beyond the project team.

2) Regarding skills, how competitive is the European automotive industry compared to other regions of the world?

I am convinced that the European auto industry is very competitive at the global level, producing the safest and cleanest vehicles in the world. If we take a look at some of the major global markets, such as China, Korea and the United States, we see that European manufacturers are very successful there, being profitable and able to attract consumers.

Now, when we look at skills, the fact that the EU auto industry is such an important global player, confirms that the European workforce is competitive and able to produce world-class vehicles. However, we all know that staying competitive is a continuous process that never comes to an end. There is no room for complacency when we talk about improving skills and education, investing in R&D or promoting international trade.

In this respect the EU has the important responsibility of providing the legislative framework needed to keep our industry competitive in the long term. The conclusions of the GEAR2030 exercise are still very important for example, highlighting the enablers key to guaranteeing the competitiveness of the EU automotive sector.

Likewise, the DRIVES project helps to create better understanding of changing industry and consumer needs. Based on these findings we can formulate concrete policy recommendations towards policy makers in Brussels, such as the European Commission, on how to safeguard the future of auto manufacturing in the EU - and with that millions of jobs.

3) What are the 3 main features you think the vehicles of the future must have?

Clearly, the first main trend is that we are moving towards vehicles that are more and more connected with the world around them. That does not only mean that it will be easier to communicate or connect to the internet from your car, but it will also allow us as an industry to provide more consumer-focused services. In the future your car will, for example, guide you automatically to a free parking spot or a charging point to give the battery of your electric vehicle a boost.

Secondly, the other key feature of tomorrow's vehicles is that they will continuously emit less emissions in the future. By offering an increasingly wide and diverse range of zero- and low-emission vehicles, manufacturers are stepping up their contribution to a better environment. Indeed, in the future there will be even more powertrain options to choose from, each serving specific communities and mobility needs.

Last, but not least, in my view the most important feature is that we need to ensure that the vehicles of the future remain affordable and that there is choice for all. While decarbonisation and digitalisation are drivers for innovation, Europe needs to make sure that the diverse mobility needs of all Europeans can be met, regardless of their financial means. In practice, industry and policy makers will need to work together in order to enable solutions suitable for consumers with different budgets.

4) What are the 2-3 songs you must have in a long car journey?

Well, the perfect playlist for a road trip should definitely include these songs:

- 'Born to be Wild' by Steppenwolf
- 'Drive' by The Cars
- 'Walking on Sunshine' by Katrina & The Waves