

## STORES

## Driving digital in-

The Retail Week award-winning Hyundai Rockar store in Bluewater offers a new retail approach: cars in shops. **John Ryan** visits

In days gone by, things were simple. You went to a shopping centre to go shopping, you went to a car showroom to buy a car and the two did not mix.

But the advent of digital has meant that what might have been perceived as a clear-cut division between the two forms of commerce is no longer quite as straightforward as it once was.

In essence, it comes down to space. Car showrooms have always needed to be big places in order to accommodate the various models that a car brand might wish to display. In-store digital displays now mean that things do not have to be this way.

The phenomenon has yet to become widespread but both Westfield London – where the high-end electric car Tesla can be bought from the Tesla shop – and the Rockar store in Bluewater, offer shoppers the chance to pick up a car while also checking out, for instance, the underwear at M&S.

And that is the point. Both Tesla and Rockar are shops. For shoppers, the experience is the same as that of entering any other retailer in the centres – you go in to browse and have a look around. There are differences, however. The Tesla store is relatively rarefied and unless the shopper has upwards of £50k to spend on a new set of wheels, then perhaps it is best avoided.

### Getting into gear

Not so Bluewater's Rockar shop, winner of the best digital store at the BT Retail Week Tech & Ecomm awards. Rockar is a purveyor of Hyundai cars – there are



A better way  
to buy your new car,  
online or instore.

### ROCKAR, BLUEWATER

**Opened** End of 2014

**Design** Dalziel & Pow

**Status** Highest 'retail'

volume sales for Hyundai in the UK

**Ambiance** Shop-like

**Next store** Westfield Stratford

four of them in this space, which measures a modest 1,200 sq ft. All of the models on show are, in automotive terms, relatively inexpensive. It is therefore entirely possible to walk into this shop and buy a car, in more or less the same manner as might be the case when shopping at, say, White Stuff, Lakeland or House of Fraser – the difference being that shoppers will not actually exit with a product.

On that basis, Rockar remains a showroom, but the experience is nonetheless far closer to shopping than it is when inspecting cars in a much larger space on the edge of a town.

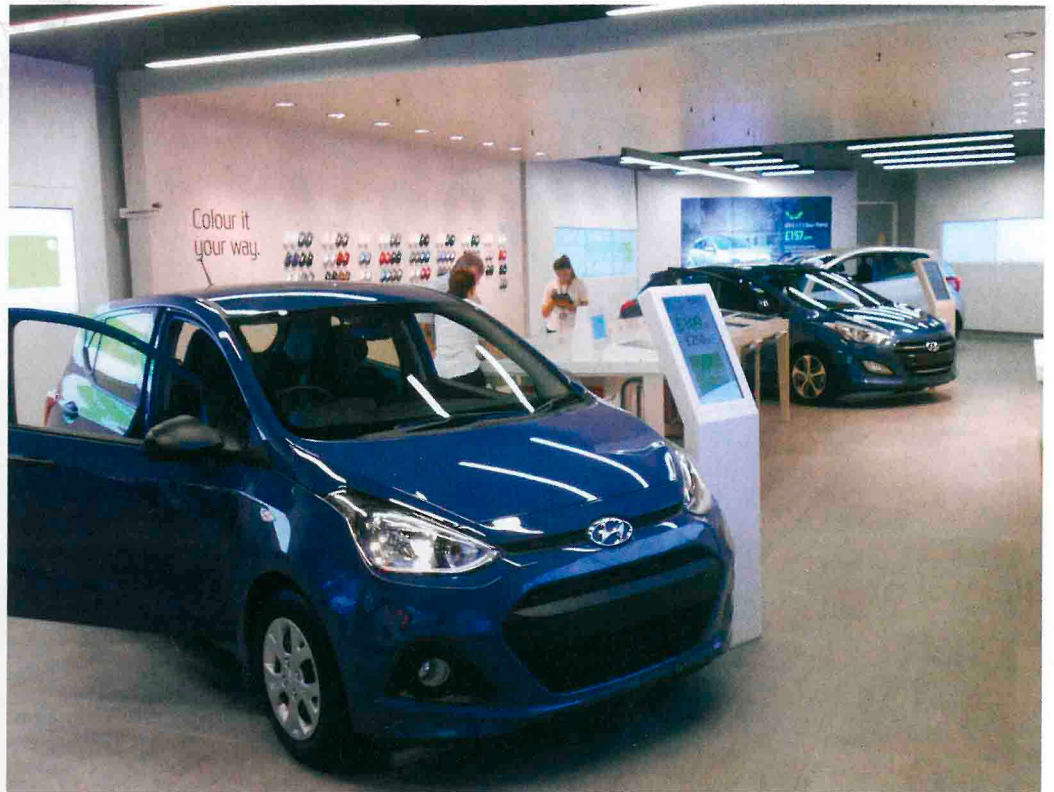
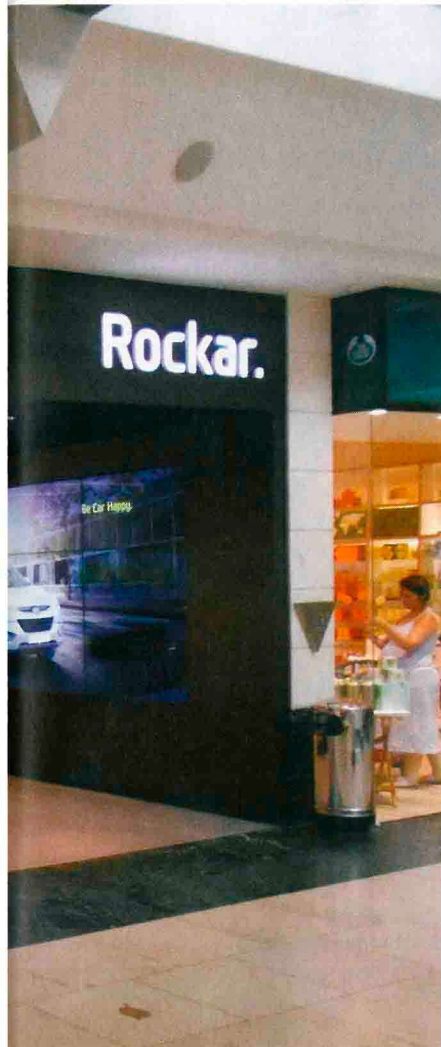
The experience is largely digital and consultancy Dalziel & Pow was tasked with creating an interior that feels like a store. That meant allowing some cars to be shown while making



More pictures of Rockar in Bluewater on  
[Retail-week.com/rockarblue](http://Retail-week.com/rockarblue)



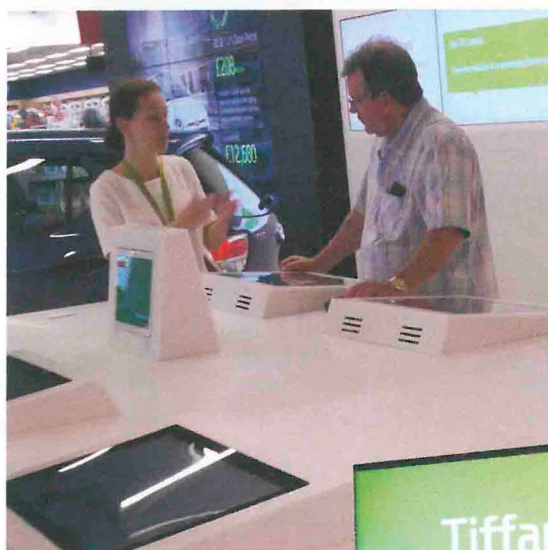
# store



**“The average age of a buyer in this store is 20 years lower than the average for a Hyundai” Michael Canham**



# STORES



► the business of inspecting the broader Hyundai offer simple.

The outcome is an open-fronted shop on Bluewater's lower level where the curious can peer in at cars and a lot of screens. In this sense, there is something of a new-look Argos about what has been done here. Yes, there are cars, but the real action happens at the white table in the mid-shop where the visitor can sit down in front of a terminal and browse the Hyundai range.

## Auto angels

The standout feature though is the human element. The staff are called 'Angels', which does rather bring Victoria's Secret to mind.

Michael Canham, retail leader at the store, says the screens are a means to an end: "95% of our time with a customer is focused on them and 5% on the transaction."

The Angels are everywhere.

They are there in person and if you want to inspect the whole team, there are large screens towards the back of the store where each one is profiled – who they are, what they like to drive and suchlike. This then is about melding the digital and the physical and breaking down the barriers that may exist between the two, according to Canham.

For shoppers that means, cars, screens and a 3D graphic on the wall where the name of each

model is backed by moulded versions of the car in different colours, illustrating what is possible at the swipe of a screen.

The obvious question in all of this is does it work? Canham says that since opening at the end of last year, the store has become Hyundai's biggest in terms of "retail volume sales", putting it ahead of 146 brand showrooms. The term 'retail' in this context means sales to walk-in shoppers. 'Fleet' sales are excluded. The

results are nonetheless impressive and certainly represent an affirmation of the decision to open a digital-based car shop in the middle of a shopping centre.

But it is also worth noting that shoppers purchasing from the Bluewater store are different from the norm. Canham comments: "The average age of a buyer in this store is 39, which is 20 years lower than the average for a Hyundai." He also says that 53% of the customers are female, which is certainly markedly different from the male-dominated norm.

That may be a reflection of the store's shopping centre location. There is also the fact that from the outset, it was intended to be an environment in which those taking a look would be acknowledged by the 'Angels', but would not feel pressured into making a purchase. Indeed, the store feels welcoming to all shoppers.

## Changing gear

There have been adaptations since opening. Canham says that originally there were three cars in the space and now there are four. The content on the mid-shop screens has also been tweaked in order to bring it more into line with the website, according to Canham. He also points out that the models on view are changed "bi-weekly", giving something different for shoppers to look at on sequential Bluewater visits.

The store appears to be catching the imagination of Bluewater shoppers, who seem to appreciate being allowed to touch and feel the product as well as accessing the information that they might need in order to make an informed purchase.

The format will be taken to Westfield Stratford in the fourth quarter of this year, where it will be on the mall's lower level in a unit formerly occupied by Phones 4u.

The omens for that location seem auspicious and it is hard not to wonder what other areas of buying and selling that might previously have been excluded from shopping centres could now be included. ■

# RetailWeek INTERIORS

**John Ryan will chair the Retail Week Interiors event on November 4 at E1 Pennington Street Studio, London. Attend to network and discover emerging store formats and design innovations from Liberty, John Lewis, Monki, Harris + Hoole and more.**  
For more information, visit [Interiors.retail-week.com](http://Interiors.retail-week.com)