

Quote by Anurag Singh, Advisor, Primus Partners

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Carmakers gearing up to hit refresh button as facelifts take priority

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Article Content:

Automakers are lining up upgrades and midcycle refreshes rather than all-new model launches in the coming year, a shift industry experts say is being driven by faster product development cycles, evolving customer expectations and tightening regulatory norms. “The product development cycle in the automotive industry has accelerated dramatically,” said Anurag Singh, advisor, Primus Partners. “Advanced design software, closer collaboration with vendors, and the digitisation and robotisation of assembly lines now allow full-model or variant upgrades that once took years to be completed in a matter of weeks,” said Singh. Analysts believe customer experience features such as connected technology, infotainment systems, ADAS, multiple drive modes, and enhanced cabin comfort have become more affordable and are evolving rapidly. At the same time, regulatory changes from emissions, fuel efficiency, safety and CAFE norms, are forcing OEMs to regularly tweak and upgrade their line-ups. “These forces are enabling and compelling automakers to introduce better-designed and better-equipped models more often,” Singh noted.

“In India’s competitive automotive market, staying relevant means continuously raising the bar.” With EV adoption rising and technology cycles shortening, the trend is expected to accelerate further. A wave of popular models is set to receive cosmetic and feature upgrades in early 2026. Key facelifts lined up for next year include the Mahindra XUV700, Mahindra Scorpio, Tata Punch, Maruti Brezza, Hyundai Verna, Hyundai Xterra, Skoda Kushaq, Volkswagen Taigun and Kia Seltos. These updates are expected to help manufacturers sustain consumer interest and keep their portfolios competitive amid a slowdown in all-new product introductions. Despite healthy demand for passenger vehicles, companies are expected to

refrain from rolling out large-scale new models. Instead, the focus will remain on facelifts, mid-cycle refreshes and feature additions. Experts say the shift is both strategic and regulatory. With the CAFE 3 fuel-efficiency standards coming into effect in April 2027, automakers are prioritising upgrades that improve efficiency and emissions compliance rather than committing to entirely new platforms.

Most of the action next year is likely to be concentrated in the compact and midsize SUV segments, particularly in the Rs 10- 20 lakh price band, which continues to attract both firsttime buyers and upgraders. Electric vehicles are also expected to gain traction, although adoption will vary by segment and pricing. Electric vehicles will also see more traction, though their pace of adoption will vary depending on segment and pricing.