

China Auto Show Highlights Electric Ambitions



On left: A McLaren Senna and on right An electric-powered SUV manufactured by automaker NIO (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

BEIJING: The biggest global auto show of the year that just concluded in Beijing showcases China's ambitions to become a leader in electric cars and the industry's multibillion-dollar scramble to roll out models that appeal to price-conscious but demanding Chinese drivers.

Auto China 2018 followed Beijing's decision to allow full foreign ownership of Chinese automakers in a move to make the industry more flexible as it promotes electrics.

The ruling Communist Party has transformed China into the biggest market for electrics with billions of dollars in subsidies to producers and buyers. Now, Beijing is winding down that support and shifting the financial burden to automakers with sales quotas that push them to develop models Chinese drivers want to buy.

That is reflected in the auto show lineup: Global and Chinese brands including General Motors Co., Volkswagen AG and Nissan Motor Co. plan to display dozens of electrics and hybrids, from luxurious SUVs to compacts priced as low as 152,000 yuan (\$24,000).

Communist leaders see elec-

tric cars as both a way to clean up smog-choked cities and a key ingredient in plans to transform China into a global competitor in an array of technology fields from robotics to solar power to biotech.

"Just in the last two or three years, China rose from being a very small player in the global EV market to be nearly 50 per cent of sales in 2017," said Christopher Robinson, who follows the industry for Lux Research. "It attracted nearly every automaker in the world," said Robinson.

Starting in 2019, automakers will be required to earn credits by selling electrics or else buy them from competitors. More stringent fuel efficiency standards will require a big share of each brand's sales to be non-gasoline models.

Global automakers say electrics should account for 35 to over 50 per cent of their China sales by 2025. "There is huge potential for vehicle electrification here," said Roland Krueger, chairman of Infiniti Motor Co., Nissan's luxury brand.

Chinese sales of electrics and gasoline-electric hybrids rose 154 per cent in the first quarter over a year earlier to 143,000 units, ac-

ording to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. That compares with sales of just under 200,000 for all of last year in the United States, the No. 2 market.

GM plans to display five all-electric vehicles including a concept Buick SUV it says can travel 600 kilometres (375 miles) on one charge, plus a hybrid Cadillac XT5 28E.

The Detroit automaker, which vies with VW for the status of China's biggest brand, is launching 10 electrics or hybrids in China from in 2016 to 2020.

VW is due to launch 15 electrics and hybrids in the next two to three years as part of a 10 billion euro (\$12 billion) plan announced in November.

Nissan is unveiling an electric model at the auto show designed for China and will display an updated version of its Leaf and an electric concept car.

The Japanese auto maker also plans to develop a lower-priced electric with a local partner, state-owned Dongfeng Motor Co. Two more versions of that are to be sold under their jointly owned Venucia brand.

China's BYD Auto, the biggest

global maker of electrics by volume with 2017 sales of 113,669 units, plans to unveil two new hybrid SUVs and an electric concept car. The company also plans to display nine other hybrid and plug-in electric models.

Infiniti plans to display a concept sedan, the Q Inspiration, that Krueger said will be the basis for future electric models.

The sleek Q Inspiration has no air-drawing engine, and thus no front grill — a change Krueger said was suggested by Chinese designers at Infiniti's Beijing studio. The car has the roomier back seat that has become standard among luxury brands that want to appeal to Chinese customers who have a driver and ride in back.

"The first car is going to cater specifically to the needs of the Chinese market," said Krueger.

Ford Motor Co. has announced a "product onslaught" this month for China that includes at least 15 electrified vehicles and 35 other models through 2025. Ford's first plug-in hybrid in China, the Mondeo Energi, went on sale last month.

Washington and other trading partners have been irked by the Chinese controls that re-

quired global automakers to work through state-owned local partners.

Automakers complained joint ventures were cumbersome and expensive but complied because they gained access to a market that passed the United States in 2009 as the world's biggest.

Last year's sales of SUVs, sedans and minivans totalled 24.7 million units, compared with 17.2 million for the United States.

The Cabinet's planning agency announced last week Beijing will loosen those controls by allowing full foreign ownership in the industry, starting with electric vehicle producers this year. Limits for commercial vehicles would end in 2020 and for all passenger vehicles in 2022.

That would end a 50 per cent cap on foreign ownership of an auto venture, a limit that required automakers to share technology with potential competitors, adding to President Donald Trump's trade complaints against Beijing.

"Now you're going to see the difference between the partners that you want and partners imposed on you," said Carlos Ghosn, chairman of the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance. - CP

Volvo Presents Second Electric Truck in Three Weeks

GOTHENBURG: Just three weeks after the unveiling of Volvo Trucks' first all-electric truck, the Volvo FL Electric, the company is expanding its product range with yet another electric truck.

The Volvo FE Electric is designed for heavier city distribution and refuse transport operations with gross weights of up to 27 tonnes. Sales will commence in Europe in 2019.

"With the introduction of the Volvo FE Electric we have a comprehensive range of electrically powered trucks for city operations and are taking yet another strategic step forward in the development of our total offer in electrified transport solutions. This opens the door to new forms



of cooperation with cities that target to improve air quality, reduce traffic noise, and cut congestion during peak hours since commercial operations can instead be carried out quietly and without

tale-pipe exhaust emissions early in the morning or late at night," says Claes Nilsson, President Volvo Trucks.

The first Volvo FE Electric, a refuse truck with a superstruc-

ture developed together with Europe's leading refuse collection bodybuilder, Faun, will start operating in late 2018 in Germany's second-largest city, Hamburg.

"Hamburg, which in 2011 was named European Green Capital of the EU, has worked long and successfully on a broad front to enhance green and sustainable urban development. This applies not least in the transport sector, where electrified buses from Volvo are already being used in the public transport network. The experiences and ambitions from this venture make Hamburg a highly interesting partner for us," says Jonas Odermalm, Product Line Vice President for the Volvo

FL and Volvo FE at Volvo Trucks. Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Siechau, CEO of Stadtreinigung Hamburg, sees large potential for environmental benefits with electric trucks in the city.

"Today, each of our 300 conventional refuse vehicles emits approximately 31.300 kg carbon dioxide every year. An electrically powered refuse truck with battery that stands a full shift of eight to ten hours is a breakthrough in technology. Another benefit is the fact that Stadtreinigung Hamburg generates climate-neutral electricity that can be used to charge the batteries." The new Volvo FE Electric will be offered in several variants for different types of assignment. - CNW

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