

AUTOMOBILES

NEW MODELS

All the fun of the show



BMW 1 Series.
Photos: Mark Andrews

With 56 global car premieres at the Guangzhou Auto Show, interest in mainland innovation, technology and even clones is higher than ever

Mark Andrews

The Guangzhou Auto Show winds up this weekend, and judging by the number of important models debuted over the past week, the southern Chinese city seems to be experiencing a resurgence in popularity among carmakers.

About 1,130 vehicles were on display at the same sprawling complex used for the Canton Trade Fair, including 56 global premieres, and simultaneous electric vehicle and commercial vehicle exhibitions.

One has to wonder what SAIC Motor Corp has in store on home turf in Shanghai next April. The group got off to a strong start in Beijing earlier this year by unveiling the Roewe RX5, billed as the first “internet car”, with a telematics system developed with Alibaba. Building on this, SAIC made three debuts in Guangzhou.

First was the MG ZS, a small Ford Ecosport-sized SUV that ushers in a new look for the brand, with a large grille and more British style than earlier offerings under Chinese ownership. Then there was the Roewe i6, which replaces the 550. Back in 2008, it was probably the best ever car to be made by a Chinese manufacturer, but is now showing its age. The i6 is likely to spawn a replacement for the MG 6, which may possibly be called the ZT.

Rounding out the trio was the Maxus T60 pickup truck. Sporting a 2.8-litre turbo diesel, this vehicle

seems well suited for export markets, and in China prices start at a bargain 99,800 yuan (HK\$112,000).

All three models have telematics largely based on the YunOS system first seen in the RX5.

Israeli-funded joint venture Qoros has been a serial underperformer in China, but three important cars building on models teased in Beijing show it may yet turn the corner.

First there is the Qoros GT, a crossover version of the venture’s saloon – certainly unusual but in the vein of Volvo’s S60 crossover. This will likely help spur some immediate sales, which should be further boosted by the Q.Lectric, an electric version capable of a highly competitive 350km range. That is enough to make it a hit with fleet operators.

With all the talk of new energy vehicles in China, it is easy to write off the petrol engine as dead. But another model shows that news of its demise may well be premature. Qoros has three revolutionary Qam-free pre-prototypes under testing. They use a “pneumatic-hydraulic-electric-actuator” to replace the camshaft, allowing more precise control of the intake and exhaust of each cylinder. Lab tests show both increased power and decreased fuel consumption.

The biggest surprise of the show came from Great Wall Motors, and the unveiling of its new Wey brand. Speculation differs as to the origin of the name. Depending on sources, it is either named after one of China’s two Wei dynasties, or the founder of Great Wall, Wei Jianjun. The company aims to create an

upmarket brand, and displayed two near production ready concept SUVs – the W01 and W02. The former features a plug-in hybrid (PHEV) – a first for Great Wall.

The problem, though, was at the stand of another Great Wall brand, Haval, which launched the H2S. It is Haval’s first SUV dreamed up by former BMW designer Pierre Leclercq, but the Wey models also designed by him look too similar, and there is potentially not enough to differentiate the brands.

BMW launched the new 1 Series saloon. It is the first time a German premium brand had gone beyond lengthening an existing car when designing one especially for China.

Strictly speaking it should have been called a 2 Series, as it bears no relationship to the 1 Series hatchback and rides on the same front-wheel-drive platform as the 2 Series Active Tourer. With its small size and powerful 1.5-litre and 2.0-litre turbo engines, it should be a hit with those looking for a cheaper performance car.

Volkswagen launched the Teramont, the Chinese name of the US-and-China-only Atlas large SUV. Also on display for the first time at a show was the recently launched C-Trek, a crossover wagon based on the Bora. VW announced a plan to launch a string of electric cars in China from 2020, but it was up to sister marque Audi to show a real deal in the form of the A6L e-tron plug-in hybrid, set for sale in China soon.

GAC Motors decided it needed something special on home turf and displayed the Enlight – a concept electric supercar. With butterfly doors and futuristic looks, it’s unlikely to go into production anytime soon. In the electric vehicle exhibition nearby, troubled Hanenergy, whose Hong Kong listing lost nearly

half its value in 24 minutes in May 2015 before being suspended, displayed its Solar R roadster. The company uses the world’s most efficient solar panels to boost the range of its electric car to 420km. In favourable sunny conditions, 8kW of power can be taken on board in five hours. Hanenergy claims the car is almost production ready and could be built in 2018.

Guangzhou always goes big on hybrids, and this year Honda showed off a hybrid version of the Accord, while Ford joined the Japanese party with a version of the Mondeo. With hybrids sidelined in China for PHEVs, due to government subsidies for new energy vehicles, it seems strange that manufacturers persist in trying to sell them.

GM, on the other hand, unveiled the Buick Velite concept of a new PHEV, which is rumoured to be a re-badged Volt in production form for China. Among some new cars for China are the Chevrolet Silverado and Colorado large pickup trucks. With many cities limiting entry to pickups, and Chinese law requiring them to have high visibility tape around the cargo bed, the market for these appears quite limited.

No Chinese car show would be complete without clones, and the honours went to the Landwind Daoyao and Lifan Xuanlang. Landwind, flush with cash from ripping off the Range Rover Evoque as the X7, offered up the Infiniti QX30-inspired Daoyao. It is not an outright clone, however, and shows that Landwind might yet make it as a firm to be taken seriously.

The Xuanlang, on the other hand, copies the Ford S-Max for Lifan’s first MPV. For Lifan, the quality is impressive with generally reasonable materials. The mechanism to access the third row of seats is stiff, though, and red paint from the body was splattered on the second-row seats.



FIVE OF THE BEST

CLASSIC CARS DRAW CROWDS AT AUCTION AS NEW MODELS REV UP FOR DEBUT

William Wadsworth

Auctioneer RL Neo Classics sold four of 21 collectibles at its Cyberport sale on November 12 and 13, and chairman Richard Lee is upbeat about the results.

“The cars were presented so very well and the fact that our ... new online bidding platform brought the sale of the lovely [1967] MGB Roadster gives me belief in attracting more international bidders in the future,” he said. The Hong Kong-registered MGB sold for HK\$270,000 on a catalogued price from HK\$270,000 to HK\$300,000.

The auction attracted more than 600 guests – three times the number who attended RL Neo Classics’ last auction at The Repulse Bay in June, where seven of 26 lots were sold. Bidding was “spirited” between three parties in the room and two online for a registered 1958 Mercedes 190 SL, the auctioneer said. The convertible was eventually sold for HK\$1.2 million, just within its catalogued estimate of HK\$1.15 million to HK\$1.3 million. A registered 1990 Honda NSX changed hands for HK\$650,000, having been catalogued at HK\$650,000-HK\$750,000.

However, the opening lot, a yellow-registered 1976 Jaguar XJ6C, set an excruciating tone to the evening. Initially offered for HK\$50,000, the Australian import



Rolls-Royce Phantom III

found few takers, until British auctioneer Guy Loveridge roused bidding by dropping its price to HK\$40,000 and then taking HK\$5,000 bids. “I know you’re shy, but we are all friends here,” he told a quiet auditorium. “It’s not where we start, but where we finish.” The XJ6 was sold for HK\$45,000 without a reserve, even though the catalogue priced it from HK\$100,000 to HK\$200,000.

A 1996 Aston Martin DB7 was rejected, just short of the published HK\$235,000 to HK\$350,000, and fine Ferrari, Lamborghini and Porsches were then passed by a thinning audience. Loveridge worked hard, but acknowledged that “some of the ‘super cars’ were less appealing to our audience, and we have learnt from this result. Knowing that we have secured a couple of cars after auction sales – with two to three more in the pipeline. I am confident that our

presentation is hitting the right targets and we will, at sale three, bring better results on the hammer”. A Ford Escort RS Cosworth and Peugeot 205 GTI were also sold, after the auction, with two other cars sales pending.

Elsewhere in the classic car world, a 1936 Rolls-Royce Phantom III had to have been the car of the week. Owned by Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels’ (HSH) chairman, Michael Kadoorie, the 7.3-litre limousine was judged best overall entry in Sunday’s Classic Car Club of Hong Kong Chater Road show.

Then it was a star attraction to celebrate the hospitality group’s 150th anniversary at The Peninsula hotel. Stunning in grey, the Phantom III was originally owned by British aristocracy, acquired at auction “three or four years ago”, and then restored in Essex by P&A Wood, according to classic car expert David McKirdy, who maintains the Kadoorie and HSH fleets. The Phantom III is also gorgeous to drive, he said. “People are used to supercars in Hong Kong, but people look up as the old Phantom passes. It has a lovely feel-good factor.”

Sunday’s Chater Road Show was arguably the best yet, with more than 100 cars squeezed into Central. It was also a fitting tribute to

event sponsor BMW, which celebrates its centenary this year. The show’s organisers “decided that the iconic BMW 3 Series would be the major sponsor cars on display to celebrate 30 years of that model,” said the club’s vice-chairman, Keith Martin. “BMW supplied a brand new M3 30th Anniversary Edition plus a new 3 Series car positioned near their marquee, and also supplied a small 1959-built Isetta, which drew an extremely large crowd of admirers.” The club also supplied 14 BMWs, including Vincent Tao Boon’s gleaming 1975 BMW 2002, and “ranged from 1974 to 1994 – mostly 3 Series, with four exceptions”, Martin said.

There were also 55 other cars on general display and 31 more were judged by a dozen experts in the Concours D’Elegance. The award winners were for best bodywork: Arthur Lai (1987 Ferrari 328); best interior: Alain Li (1955 Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing Coupe); best engine/chassis: Yeung Siu-tim (1994 Honda NSX A2 3.0); best saloon: Terence Ku (1985 Mercedes-Benz 190 E 2.3 16V);

best coupe: David Sung (1952 Bentley Mark VI Coupe); best convertible: Frederick Sum (1964 Chevrolet GMC Corvette Stingray); best contemporary classic: Tam Chie-sang (1996 Porsche Targa); best overall: Michael Kadoorie: 1936 Rolls Royce Phantom III. The public voted Michael Wan’s 1974 Alfa Romeo GT 1600 Junior and Yeung Siu-tim’s 1994 Honda NSX A2 3.0 as the most desirable and best-presented cars, while Frederick Sum’s 1990 Z1 won two similar BMW awards.

Meanwhile, Gloucester Road has been busy. Lamborghini Hong Kong sold its green HK\$8 million Aventador Miura Homage in less than a month. One of only 50 made, it is one of the fastest cars in town, as its 700hp, 6.5-litre engine produces 690Nm at 5,500rpm, tops at 350km/h and tonnes in 2.9 seconds. British Motors is already inviting online order inquiries for the electric Jaguar I-Pace crossover, which was only launched on November 15. (Details at www.jaguar.com.hk).

Finally, Hyundai Hong Kong has unveiled its 1.6-litre Ioniq Hybrid (HK\$249,000), with a 103hp, 1.6-litre Kappa GDI engine; a 42hp electric motor and a six-speed dual-clutch transmission. The 2016 Red Dot Award-winning saloon looks well-styled and equipped for its price.



BMW 2002



Jaguar I-Pace



Hyundai Ioniq Hybrid



Mercedes 190 SL