

BAIC introduces D20 range, second model to follow later this year



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Beijing Automotive Industry Group Company (BAIC) has unveiled the passenger car that it hopes will secure its first customers in the South African market.

The D20 compact hatchback and sedan range “is a boutique small car for the South African market”, said BAIC International VP **Li Xiaofan** on Monday evening in Johannesburg.

BAIC had a technology sharing agreement with Mercedes-Benz, he noted, with the D20 based on Mercedes-Benz Smart Forfour platform technology. It also integrated the “SAAB sports gene”.

BAIC and Daimler in 2003 established the Beijing Benz joint venture (JV), which, from April 1, has former Mercedes-Benz South Africa boss Arno van der Merwe as its CEO. BAIC in 2009 acquired the intellectual property rights for Sweden’s SAAB vehicle brand.

While the D20 launched in South Africa this week is currently imported from China, BAIC aims to produce the vehicle at its Coega plant, in the Eastern Cape, once production starts in 2018.

At full capacity, the R11-billion JV plant would be able to produce 100 000 vehicles a year, said Xiaofan.

The R4.25-billion first phase would have the installed capacity to manufacture 50 000 units a year.

Around two-thirds of production were destined for the export market.

BAIC is the major shareholder in the plant, holding 65% of the venture. South Africa’s Industrial Development Corporation holds the remaining 35%.

The local D20 range consists of five hatchback models and one sedan. Pricing starts at R149 990, with the range topping out with the sedan, at R209 990.

Customers can choose between a 1.3-litre or 1.5-litre petrol engine, and a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic transmission in the hatchback derivative, while the sedan features the 1.5-litre engine and automatic transmission.

The automatic transmission has three mode settings: Eco, Snow (for a smooth pull away on loose surfaces) and Sport.

The 1.3-litre engine produces 75 kW of power and 128 Nm of torque available between 3 800 rpm to 4 800 rpm.

The 1.5-litre engine produces 85 kW of power and 148 Nm of torque, also available between 3 800 rpm to 4 800 rpm.

Styling of the D20 hatchback “is reminiscent of the first-generation Mercedes-Benz B-Class model”, says BAIC in its media material.

Around four metres in length, the rear seat of the hatch splits 60:40, and the backrest can be folded forward to provide 1 190 l of load space. The sedan’s boot capacity is 450 l.

There are two levels of trim and equipment, namely comfort and fashion.

The comfort’s instrument cluster includes a trip meter, while the higher-spec fashion models also have a 6.5-inch touchscreen with a navigation system, as well as a six-speaker audio system.

Suspension is by means of MacPherson struts in the front and a torsion beam at the rear.

All vehicles feature antilock braking and electronic brake distribution, as well as two airbags.

Reversing radar with audible and visible warnings are standard on all models.

The D20 also features power steering and an adjustable steering column.

Inside, the D20 has two Isofix mountings on the rear seats.

Automatic windscreen wipers are standard on all models, except the 1.3-litre model.

Fashion models feature remote locking and an immobiliser.

Other features exclusive to Fashion models include air conditioning, an electric sunroof, day time running lights and heated rearview mirrors that fold automatically when the engine is switched off.

The D20 is covered by a 5 year/120 000 km warranty.

Service intervals are every 10 000 km.

There is a free service at 3 000 km.

Optional service and maintenance plans are available through the dealer network.

The D20 range will be sold and serviced by a national network of 21 dealers, which is currently being rolled out by BAIC. A network of 45 dealers is envisaged within the next three years.

BAIC is also building a new parts warehouse and training centre in Linbro Park, in Gauteng, added BAIC South Africa (SA) deputy GM **Gary Yang**.

BAIC SA has also set up BAIC Financial Services with Absa Bank.

The D20 is to be followed by another product to be introduced to the South African market later this year.

BAIC has eight passenger cars, nine commercial vehicles and three new-energy vehicles in its portfolio.

“We are doing business in the right way, from the start,” said Yang. “As the largest economy in Africa, South Africa is a very important strategic market of BAIC in the world and the centre of business in Africa,” added Xiaofan.

“In the future, the group’s base in South Africa will be developed into a comprehensive industrial base, including automobile research and development, automobile manufacturing, automobile finance, automobile service, car rental, used car business and a new energy business.”