

Datsun back in India as brand returns

NEW DELHI, INDIA: Japanese car company Nissan resurrected its iconic Datsun marque on Monday (15 July) as it launched its new generation of vehicles for economy-minded buyers in emerging markets.



Nissan, which in 1981 killed the Datsun badge that was a favourite of legions of Western drivers, has launched a "next-generation" of the Datsun to penetrate high-growth developing economies.

Nissan Motor Co. chief executive Carlos Ghosn unveiled the first new Datsun model in the New Delhi satellite city of Gurgaon. The car is set to go on sale in India next year.

"The Datsun is back!" Ghosn declared, showing off the five-door hatchback which features swept-back headlights and a sporty grill.

The hatchback will later be rolled out in Russia, South Africa and Indonesia. There are no immediate plans to sell the cars in the United States or Europe.

Ghosn, who also heads French carmaker Renault, said Nissan has retained the Datsun brand concept of "reliability and fuel-efficiency" but "completely updated the product".

He gave no price for the car, to be known as the Datsun GO, but said it would retail for less than 400,000 rupees (US\$6,678).

With the relaunched Datsun, which will be locally assembled, Nissan aims to fill a low-cost niche from which it has been absent, while keeping its main Nissan brand upmarket.

First Datsun sold in 1931

The Datsun, which first went on sale in 1931, was sold in 190 countries. But Nissan scrapped the name more than two decades ago, opting to use its own badge for the cars. The move annoyed many loyal Datsun customers around the world.

Ghosn said the new Datsun would give Nissan a "meaningful presence in high-growth markets" where small low-cost cars dominate.

In a couple of years, Nissan expects 60% of all car sales globally to be in high-growth markets such as India, Indonesia and Russia.

"In the United States, 50% of people have a car, while in Russia the figure is just 28%. In South Africa, 16% of people own cars but in Indonesia only 7% are car owners," Ghosn said.

In India, which has a population of 1.2bn and where global car manufacturers see the greatest potential, car owners represent just 15 out of every 1,000 people.

"There is a significant transition (in buying patterns) in global markets," Ghosn said.

But Datsun will not face an easy ride in India's fiercely competitive vehicle segment, where market leader Maruti Suzuki, controlled by Japan's Suzuki, sells its low-cost Alto hatchback for less than US\$5,000.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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