

Luxury carmakers looking at SUVs

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND: Large or small, affordable or off-the scale pricey: urban sports utility vehicles abound at the Geneva Motor Show, with luxury manufacturers are moving into this lucrative market.



Porsche expects to sell 50,000 Macan models a year. Image: [Motor Trend](#)

One of the stars of the show, which opened its doors to the media on Tuesday (4 March), is Porsche's new Macan.

Crowds flocked around as the German manufacturer unveiled the sleek, dark grey machine for the first time in Europe to great fanfare.

"I can tell you that the intake is already very, very strong. It's better than we expected," head of Porsche sales and marketing Bernhard Maier said, pointing out that in Germany the line of buyers was so long deliveries would take about six

months.

Once known only as a sports car maker, the company has lead the charge of luxury car builders seeking to grab a slice of the booming and super trendy SUV segment.

After showing the way just over a decade ago with the arrival of its mid-size luxury crossover the Cayenne, which today accounts for more than half of its sales, the company has moved on to its baby sister, the Macan.

With 340hp under its clamshell bonnet for the S version, the compact SUV will hit European showrooms next month with an asking price of around €60 000.

As it moves into this new segment, the maker of the iconic 911 is broadening its range and appears to be on a steady course to sell 200,000 cars a year.

50,000 Macans a year

Porsche is set to push out a cool 50,000 Macans a year from its factory in Leipzig, Germany, and is making it pricier than the basic versions of its competitors Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Mercedes' GLK.

Growing faster than any other segment, the new and smaller, yet luxurious SUVs have a knack at drawing in the coveted younger buyers who have yet to develop loyalty to any specific brand.

"The example of Porsche shows that there is also a demand for a new type of car within the luxury segment," German car industry analyst Stefan Bratzel said.

He hailed Porsche for managing to transmit the aura of its brand to other types of vehicles by ensuring that the race car DNA shines through, in the engine and design.

A number of other luxury manufacturers are set to follow Porsche's lead.

Bentley planning an SUV

British Bentley says it will launch an ultra-powerful model of SUV for the super rich in two years time, in a bid to reach its



Bentley's Falcon SUV is likely to go on sale in 2016

target of doubling its sales to 15,000 cars each year by 2018.

Industry expert Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer said such a vehicle would likely cost around €180,000, not enough to make the target buyers in Russia, China and the Middle East wince.

Italy's Lamborghini, which like both Bentley and Porsche, belongs to Volkswagen, unveiled its SUV concept Urus two years ago, but is still waiting for VW to give it the green light for production.

"The market potential would in the US, in Middle East, in China and in some European markets," Lamborghini chief Stephan Winkelmann said.



Lamborghini's Urus SUV is still awaiting a final decision from VW to go ahead.

And Maserati, which belongs to Italian Fiat, has hinted its Levante luxury crossover SUV might hit the market next year.

British Rolls-Royce, owned by Germany's BMW, also says it is looking into building a car in the segment. But the company, renowned for its refined limousines, is wary that the soul of its brand might be lost in the process.

"The SUV segment is a very interesting segment for us to look at," Rolls-Royce sales chief Jolyon Nash said, pointing to the strong growth and rosy outlook for the

segment.

"But the big question for us is are we able to design, a car that is an authentic Rolls-Royce?" he said.

British Land Rover, which takes credit for inventing the concept of luxury 4x4s decades ago, insists it's not worried by the new competitors in its traditional market, with brand designer Richard Woolly stressing the company's true heritage.

Jaguar, which like Land Rover is owned by Indian Tata Motors, also aims to profit from that long experience: Last September it presented its own SUV concept, the C-X17.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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