

Design must make a splash for car makers hoping to ride China's second wave of automotive growth

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The second wave of China's emerging consumer automotive market will demand more design-driven vehicles, said world-leading design experts at the country's first international automotive design convention.

Delegates at the Interior Motives China Conference 2007 in Shanghai last week, heard that the country's fledgling automotive market not only has different design requirements, but is growing in a different way to western markets. China had no private car sales before 2001 and consumer expectations are not based on traditions found in the more established Western car markets.

"All cars are luxury," explained Li-Chih Fu, design director for Nanjing Automotive, owners of the MG brand: "luxury should be addressed as a must-have factor for any segment". He suggested that the second wave of car buyers in China, often private buyers from inland cities, are likely to shun formal, business-orientated designs in favour of more expressive, dynamic styling. China's fresh start also offers the opportunity for designers to change the perceptions of green vehicles. Citroen's project manager Mark Lloyd suggested green vehicles could be designed to move away from "the twentieth century 'mechanical machine' with roaring engine and big wheels to a twenty-first century technical object, that is more sensuous, intelligent and clean. Chinese mores are already having an influence far beyond its shores. Ford of Europe and Asia Pacific's executive design director Martin Smith said that the next version of their global Mondeo model would include several design changes made specifically in response to Chinese customer requirements. A near 200-strong audience came to hear speakers from Western and Chinese car brands explain both the massive opportunities and challenges of selling vehicles in the new market. China's automotive market overtook Japan in 2006 to become the second biggest in the world, with more than seven million in annual vehicle sales. Held at the prestigious Le Royal Meridien Hotel in the heart of Shanghai, delegates including designers from carmakers and tier one suppliers, and brand experts listened to a diverse range of speakers from the automotive world. These included Olivier Boulay, director of the Mercedes-Benz Advanced Design Centre of Japan, Du Cao, Chief Engineer at Chery Automobile and design studio director of Yanfeng Visteon Automotive Interiors, Shizuki Kajiyama. Contacts Press Enquires Shashank Deshmukh Market Engineering tel: +44 (0)1295 277 050

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