

China opens auto show under anti-disease controls

September 26 2020, by Joe McDonald



Security guards wearing masks and armed with restrainers stand guard at the entrance to the Auto China 2020 show in Beijing, China on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2020. The auto show, the first major in-person sales event for any industry since the coronavirus pandemic began, opens Saturday in a sign the ruling Communist Party is confident China has contained the disease. Still, automakers face intensive anti-virus controls including quarantines for visitors from abroad and curbs on crowd sizes at an event that usually is packed shoulder-to-shoulder with spectators. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

Ford, Nissan and BMW unveiled new electric models with more range for the Chinese market on Saturday as the Beijing auto show opened under anti-virus controls that included holding news conferences by international video link.

Automakers are looking to China, the first major economy to start recovering from the coronavirus pandemic, to drive sales growth and reverse multibillion-dollar losses.

Auto China 2020, postponed from March, is the first major trade show for any industry since the pandemic began. The ruling Communist Party's decision to go ahead with it reflects official confidence China, where the pandemic began in December, has the disease under control.

"The 2020 Beijing [motor show](#) is a symbol of hope," BMW AG's China CEO, Jochen Goller, told reporters who wore masks but stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the event. He paid tribute to Chinese medical workers who "made it possible for us to enjoy this large-scale event today."

Authorities ordered limits on crowds at the event, which attracted 820,000 visitors at its last installment in 2018. Employees walked through the cavernous exhibition center carrying signs that said, "Be Sure to Wear Masks."

China's [auto market](#), the world's biggest, already has rebounded to sales above pre-pandemic levels. Purchases rose 6% in August compared with a year earlier, while U.S. sales were down 9.5%.



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Global and Chinese automakers displayed dozens of electric models, part of a race by the industry to meet Chinese government sales quotas imposed to promote the technology.

The Communist Party wants to make China a leader in the technology

and has used subsidies and other support to transform it into the biggest EV market, accounting for about half of global sales. Beijing ended restrictions on foreign ownership of electric vehicle producers in 2018 to spur competition.

Electrics increasingly offer speeds and acceleration to rival gasoline engines in an effort to make the technology a mainstream product. Some promise ranges of up to 600 kilometers (370 miles) on one charge, or more than the average tank of gasoline, to combat "range anxiety," or consumers' fear of running out of power.

Ford Motor Co. held the China debut of its all-electric Mustang Mach-E SUV. It promises 0-to-100 kph (0-to-60 mph) acceleration in 3.5 seconds.



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Nissan Motor Co. showed its all-electric Ariya SUV, which it said can travel up to 610 kilometers (380 miles) on one charge.

The Ariya "sets the tone for a new Nissan," said CEO Makoto Uchida in a video showed at the company stand.

Most foreign-based auto executives stayed home due to [travel restrictions](#) that require visitors arriving in China from abroad to undergo a two-week quarantine. Some planned to hold news conferences by video link. Several brands broadcast their events online to reach auto writers abroad.

BMW displayed its iX3 electric SUV, which Goller said will be produced at a factory in China's northeast for sale worldwide. The company also held the global debut of its M3 sedan and M4 coupe, reflecting the growing importance of China's luxury market.

Demand for electrics weakened last year as Beijing started to wind down subsidies. They were due to end this year, but regulators extended them at a lower level through 2022 to help the industry weather the pandemic.



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China's major auto shows, held in Beijing and Shanghai in alternate years, are the industry's biggest events, attracting every global automaker and dozens of new but ambitious Chinese brands. The last Beijing auto show in 2018 received 820,000 visitors, according to organizers.

This week's event follows a smaller [auto](#) show in July in the western city of Chengdu with 120 exhibitors, equal to about 10% of the size of the typical Beijing and Shanghai shows.

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