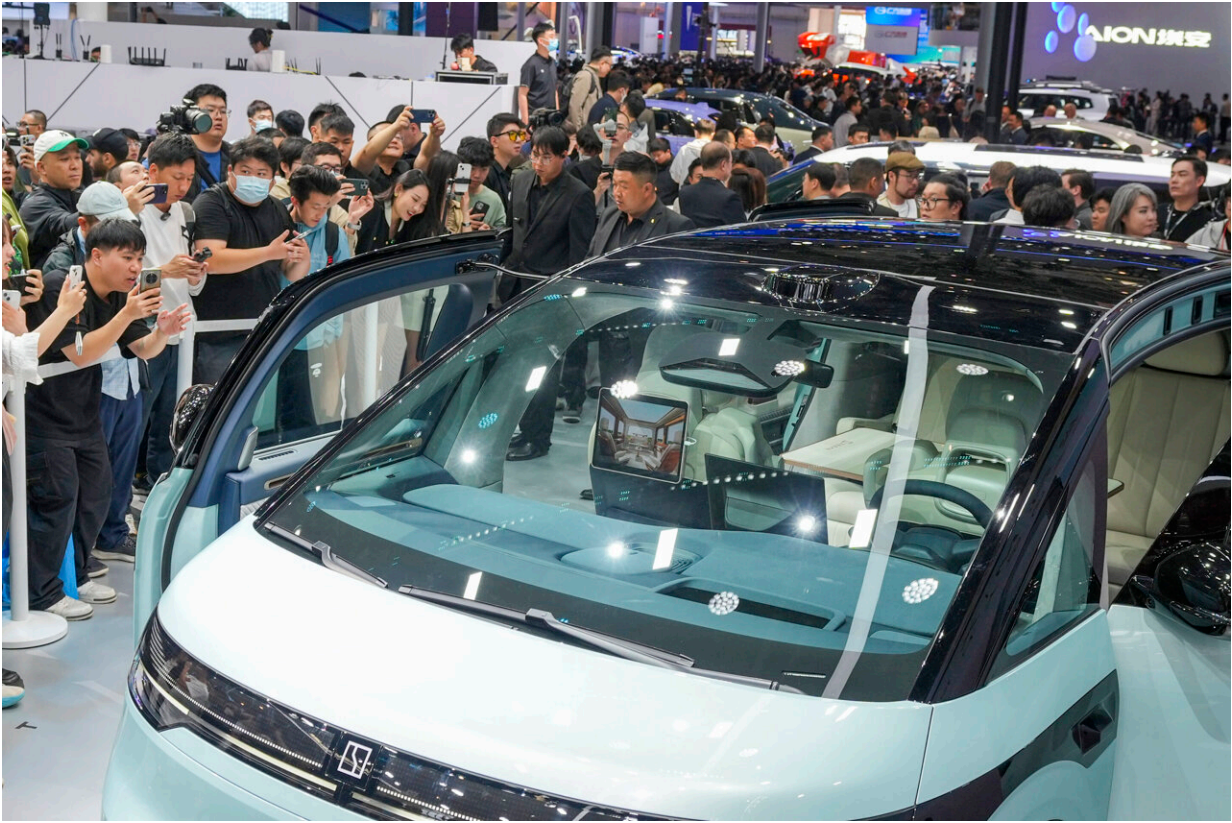


Electric cars and digital connectivity dominate at Beijing auto show

April 25 2024, by Ken Moritsugu



Visitors take photos of a Zeekr car during the opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

Global automakers and EV startups unveiled new models and concept cars at China's largest auto show on Thursday, with a focus on the

nation's transformation into a major market and production base for digitally connected, new-energy vehicles.

Toyota and Nissan both announced tie-ups with major Chinese technology companies as they strive to meet customer demand for AI-enabled online connectivity in cars, from social media apps to autonomous driving features.

Electric vehicles accounted for about a quarter of all auto sales in China last year. Hybrids, which have trailed EVs, are expected to be a growing segment going forward.

China's largest EV maker, BYD, showed off two "dual-mode" plug-in cars that can run either solely on electricity or as hybrids. The other is a hybrid off-road SUV from its luxury Yangwang brand in the 1 million yuan-plus (\$140,000) range.

"China's EVs, represented by (BYD's) Qin and Han series, have successfully realized the large-scale replacement of traditional fuel cars, and this trend is irreversible," said Lu Tian, the head of sales for BYD's Dynasty models. The cars are named after former imperial dynasties.

An executive from Chery, a more traditional Chinese maker, offered a more moderate perspective. Li Xueyong, a deputy general manager, said they envision a future of 40% fuel vehicles, 30% hybrids and 30% electric. The company plans to develop both fuel-powered and new-energy cars.



Visitors look at an MG car during the opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

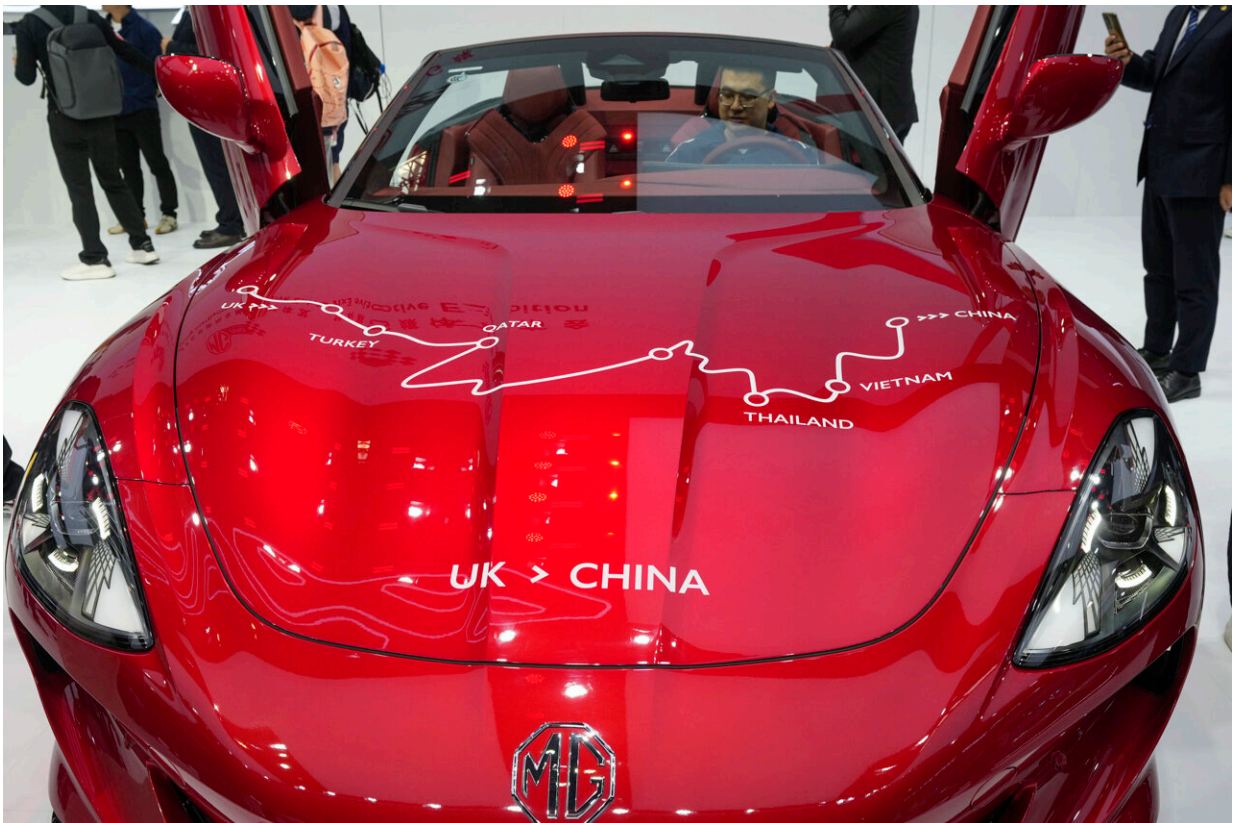
BYD has been expanding rapidly into overseas markets, launching its low-priced Dolphin Mini, sold as the Seagull in China, in Latin American markets this year.

It's building a factory in Brazil on the site of a former Ford plant that closed when the U.S. maker left the country. Two other Chinese automakers including Chery already have factories in Brazil.

BYD accounted for 41% of EV sales in Brazil in the first three months of this year, though the overall number is still relatively low.

In Mexico, Chinese vehicles went from about 2.6% of the market in 2021 to 19.2% in the first quarter of this year. Most of those were gasoline-powered vehicles, as there are few charging stations and the cost of electricity makes it expensive to do so at home.

Chinese makers are making inroads in Europe too, raising concern in some countries that they pose a potential threat to European automakers and jobs. The EU is weighing whether to impose tariffs on China-made EVs because of government subsidies that drove the industry's growth.



Visitors check at an MG car during the opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

A proliferation of EV makers, encouraged by tax breaks as well as green-energy subsidies, has prompted a fierce price war that is expected to lead to a shakeout and consolidation of the industry in the coming years.

For foreign players aside from American EV maker Tesla, it has challenged them to accelerate the development of new electric car models to stay competitive in the world's largest auto market.

"No other region of the world has a transformation of the automotive industry that is as fast-paced as in China," Volkswagen CEO Oliver Blume said Wednesday at an event previewing its appearance at the auto show.

"This market has become something of a fitness center for us," he said. "We have to work harder and faster to keep."

Other automakers expressed similar sentiments. Japan's Nissan sent many top executives to the Beijing auto show to feel first-hand the pace of change in China, company President Makoto Uchida said.



Visitors look at a Great Wall's Haval car during the opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana

Nissan was going to sign a memorandum or understanding with Baidu, a Chinese search engine and AI company, later Thursday. Uchida said Nissan needs to meet the needs of Chinese customers and the speed at which the market is changing.

"If we cannot do these two aspects, it will very difficult to keep our business in China," he said.

Toyota announced a tie-up with Tencent, the maker of the widely-used WeChat messaging and e-payment app.

Volvo, the Swedish brand bought by China's Geely group, stressed a simpler approach to the digitalization of its cars.

Likely aiming at a somewhat older audience, the company said its new EX30 electric SUV has an audio system and tablet screen that are easy to operate and uses sustainable fabrics in its interior.

"We believe that technology should be measured by its utility, not just its novelty," said Xiaolin Yuan, Volvo's Asia-Pacific head.



Visitors take photos of a Zeekr car during the opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana



Visitors photograph a Lamborghini car during the opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana



The BYD Han EV car sedan is shown during Auto China 2024 held in Beijing, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan



Founder and CEO of the electric car manufacturer Nio, William Li, waves to the media during a press conference at the opening of the China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana



Founder and CEO of the electric car manufacturer Nio, William Li speaks during a press conference at the opening China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana



Attendees take photos of the BYD Qin L Dmi unveiled during Auto China 2024 held in Beijing, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan



Visitors take photos of a MG concept car during an opening of China Auto Show in Beijing, China, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana



The all electric Mini Aceman is unveiled at the BMW booth during Auto China 2024 held in Beijing, Thursday, April 25, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

The EX30 will sell for 210,000 to 260,000 yuan (\$29,000—\$36,000) in China, the company announced.

American brands at the show included Lincoln, Cadillac, Buick and Chevrolet. Ford presented a muscular look tied to its history, telling the story of the Mustang and Bronco—which it described as a "[sports utility vehicle](#)" when it was launched in 1966—and showing the latest versions of those models.

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