

China's BYD hopes for turnaround with Si Rui sedan

November 23 2012, by Kelvin Chan



In this Thursday, Nov. 22, 2012 photo, a model poses next to a BYD (Build Your Dream) Si Rui at the company's booth during the Guangzhou 2012 Auto Show in China's southern city of Guangzhou. Chinese automaker BYD Company may be hoping that Si Rui, the name for its new midsize sedan, translates into turnaround. The ailing company, which counts billionaire Warren Buffet as an investor, is banking on the new model to help spur a revival in sales. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

(AP)—Chinese automaker BYD Co. may be hoping that Si Rui

(pronounced suh-ray), the name for its new midsize sedan, translates into turnaround. The ailing company, which counts billionaire Warren Buffett as an investor, is banking on the new model to help spur a revival in sales.

The car, which made its debut at the Guangzhou auto show this week in [southern China](#), is a follow up to the bestselling F3. That model was hugely popular with buyers in China partly thanks to now-discontinued government subsidies.

But the company's incoherent business strategy means it was an isolated success. BYD, which also makes [rechargeable batteries](#) and [mobile phone handsets](#), was aggressive with its expansion into electric cars as Beijing announced the goal of making China a global power in electric car manufacturing. But the bet failed to pay off because of a lack of buyer interest and technological hurdles.

BYD and other Chinese carmakers have also been squeezed by growing numbers of foreign brands entering China's fast-growing [auto market](#), the world's biggest. BYD is hoping the Si Rui can help the company stand out against numerous other direct competitors in the hugely competitive smaller midsize slice of the market, which ranges from Geely's Emgrand line to the Volkswagen Santana and Citroen Elysee.

Here's more about the 2013 Si Rui:

PRICE: BYD has not yet released the sticker price for the Si Rui, which won't go on sale until next year. Analysts guess it will be somewhere around the 70,000 yuan (\$11,200) level. That's about the same as the 630 sedan by Chevrolet's only-in-China brand Baojun.

POWER: A turbocharged 1.5 liter four-cylinder all-aluminum engine that pumps out 151 horsepower is the sole choice. BYD did not provide

[fuel consumption](#) data but boasts that combined with the six-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission, Si Rui "makes use of every drop of fuel." A six-speed manual gearbox is also available.

EXTERIOR: Chinese automakers are still catching up to their foreign rivals when it comes to design and judging from the Si Rui's looks, that's still the case. While it's sleeker and more modern than the F3, with angular headlights and sculpted lines, the Si Rui is still highly reminiscent of a Honda Accord or Toyota Corolla.

INTERIOR: Visitors to the Guangzhou auto show were unfortunately not allowed to look inside the one Si Rui model on display. But potential buyers will be comparing the quality of the dashboard, fabrics and fit and finish with foreign brands. Chinese carmakers have had a tough time raising their quality game and a close look at other BYD models on display showed they were, as the Chinese say, just "mama-huhu," or so-so, with plasticky door handles and inconsistent gaps between door and body.

TECH: A few high-tech touches will make the Si Rui appeal to gadget freaks. Drivers will be able to see in the dark thanks to a night vision system, which will display an enhanced view of the road ahead to the driver through a heads-up display on the dashboard. The dash also features a 10.2 inch touchscreen to control navigation, parking and entertainment systems. A 500 gigabyte hard drive can hold 1,000 movies and 100,000 songs.

NAME: Si Rui is a made-up word in Chinese. Its closest meaning would be "perceptive."

WHY IT MATTERS: BYD's third-quarter profit plunged 94 percent to 4.6 million yuan as the number of cars sold fell 18 percent year-on-year to 77,000. Clearly, having a hit in China's car market, which saw sales of

18.5 million vehicles last year, would be a huge help to BYD and investor Buffett, who spent \$232 million on a 10 percent stake in 2008. The wisdom of that investment, which was based on the attractiveness of BYD's battery technology, now looks a bit doubtful.

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