

Putin rolls out new Russian limo at inauguration

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The new Russian-made limousine carrying Russian president-elect Vladimir Putin to his inauguration ceremony at the Kremlin in Moscow on May 7, 2018.

Russian President Vladimir Putin glided across the Kremlin square in a boxy black Russian-made limousine ahead of Monday's inauguration, making a break with previous ceremonies when he used a Mercedes.

The new model called the Senate Limousine marks a return to the Soviet-era practice of the country's leaders riding in domestically made ceremonial cars.

Soviet leaders rode in ZIL limousines, while lower-ranking officials had chauffeured Chaikas, or seagulls.

RIA Novosti state news agency quoted a guest at the ceremony as saying that the new car "is cooler than Trump's," with the US President riding in a Cadillac.

"This is the main automobile intrigue of the last five years," raved a reporter on Rossiya 24 television, boasting that the car is "made in Russia, made with Russian components and made by the hands of Russian specialists."

Nevertheless the new Senate Limousine model also benefited from "international experience", the reporter said, since its engine was developed with the help of engineers from Porsche.

The limousine has been in development since 2013, TASS reported, with the project allocated 12.4 billion rubles (\$197 million) in state funds. Initial production began last year.

Putin rode in a Mercedes Pullman at his previous three inaugurations.

The new limo, measuring just over 6 metres (around 20 feet), is part of a range called Aurus that will also include a sedan simply called Senate and an MPV called Arsenal, Russian television reported, saying the names were taken from Kremlin towers.

The range will also go on sale commercially and will compete in terms of specifications and price with Mercedes-Maybach, Bentley and Rolls-

Royce vehicles, TASS reported.

Russian leaders have long enjoyed making an entrance with their showy cars.

Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin took over the cars of the former royal family and rode in a Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost while Stalin's favourite car was a Packard, TASS reported.

ZIL armoured limousines appeared in the 1950s and were used until the mid-1990s, after which officials largely used Mercedes. The Chaika limousine was also developed in the 1950s.

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