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CHANGE OF DIRECTION



Mercedes V-Class: The versa



The Mercedes V-Class transports the family in comfort, luxury and style, and comes with an array of high-tech features.

THE versatility of the Mercedes V-Class is proving increasingly attractive to the Cambodian car buyer, drawing the Kingdom's motorists away from the ubiquitous SUV.

The strength of the luxury people carrier is its multi-functionality, says Khun Chantha, sales and marketing director at Star Auto (Cambodia), the only authorised distributor of Mercedes-Benz vehicles in the Kingdom.

"The V-Class can be used for daily use, or for trips to the province at weekends, as business transport, or to carry VIPs from the airport to their hotel," Chantha says.

And with large, plush "captain's" chairs, a cool box, ambient lighting, Burmester surround sound system, climate control and a strong yet elegant design, whatever you use it for, you will do so in comfort, luxury and style.

The growing popularity of the six-, seven- or eight-seat (depending on your chosen configuration) multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) reflects the importance of the family for Cambodians.

"Customers choose the V-Class to transport the family in luxury. In many Cambodian families, the father may have one car, his wife another, while the son and daughter will have their own cars.

"With the V-Class, the whole family travels together, strengthening their relationship while saving money, whether this is for weekend trips or special occasions, or for daily use," Chantha says.

The V-Class' diamond grille is the face of the changing landscape of Cambodian motoring, with the revamped Mercedes-Benz MPV featuring a sportier look.

Chantha says the Kingdom's auto sector has travelled far in a short space of time.

"There is a very long history of the SUV in Cambodia, even back to the [post-conflict] days of the early 90s, and with the country having very poor road conditions, many Cambodians dreamt of having an SUV.

"But with the roads a lot better, even from Phnom Penh to the

provinces, people began buying sedans. Now they are buying the V-Class, which is a multipurpose vehicle that can carry more than five people in comfort," he says.

While outside Cambodia the V-Class is available in three wheelbase lengths, Star Auto sells only the extra long version – and it is a lot of car for your cash, all beneath the prestigious Mercedes badge.

"With the introduction of the V-Class five years ago, we showed that a stylish and dynamic presence is also possible in XXL [extra long version] format. In doing so,

we were able to convince families, leisure adventurers and business customers alike – from Europe right across to Asia.

"Proof of this can be found in the 209,000 or so V-Class units that have been sold since its market launch, as well as in the fact that the vehicle has one of the youngest buyer groups across Mercedes-Benz.

"As of the beginning of 2020, we'll be continuing this success story. With the facelift, we're building on the strengths of our MPV in a targeted manner," says Wilfried Porth, director of labour

relations at Mercedes-Benz Vans.

Prices for the V-Class start at around \$131,000, and Chantha says this is some \$50,000 less the V-Class' nearest competitor in the luxury MPV segment, while even V-Class MPVs bought on the grey market cost more.

"The prices at Star Auto are so affordable because of the great support from Mercedes, with special prices from the factory to offer Cambodians the chance to own a very special vehicle," Chantha says, while financing is available to get you behind the wheel of your dream car.

Buying a Mercedes from Star Auto also means benefiting from the German car giant's renowned after-sales service.

"Our after-sales service is the best in the country, with our international technicians – including from the UK and Australia – having been trained by Mercedes, while our local technicians are very experienced with Mercedes, with at least five to 10 years' experience.

"In the unlikely event that a problem can't be fixed here, we can have a technician come over from the Mercedes-Benz regional



ntile vehicle for all occasions

office or from Germany, depending on the case. We also have a body and paint workshop, which nobody else in the country has," Chantha says.

The focal points of the V-Class range include a striking, restyled front end, as well as the introduction of the OM 654 generation four-cylinder diesel engine, with the V250 reaching 211hp. The V-Class also offers unparalleled safety, scoring a full five-star rating after Euro NCAP (New Car Assessment Programme) testing, and carries the latest technology safety and assistance systems.

The V-Class line from AMG is proving to be Star Auto's biggest seller, with bodystyling from the high-performance division impressively enhancing the MPV's dynamic appearance.

The front apron with its prominent air inlets, diamond-pattern mesh and chrome trim, the expressive spoiler lip and the diffuser-look rear apron emphasise the muscular character of the MPV, with AMG 19-inch light-alloy wheels in a seven-twin-spoke design rounding off the sporty look.

"When you buy a Mercedes from Star Auto, you are getting a premium car without equal, and we are less expensive than our competitors and even the grey market. A vehicle from Star Auto is guaranteed to be unmodified – a real Mercedes – while the V-Class is the right car for the family and for business," Chantha says. ■



The cockpit of the V-Class features high-quality recessed switches and inputs integrated into one extensive wave shape.



Temperature-controlled double cup holder.



Perfectly formed five-twin-spoke light-alloy wheels with 245/45 R19 tyres.



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GREAT EXPECTATIONS



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

The Haval H6 SUV comes with a host of features.

WHILE it may have been unusual in the past for the Kingdom's car buyers to choose a Chinese vehicle over Japanese and European marques, this is changing rapidly.

The chairman of Worldwide Motors Company (WMC) – Cambodia's leading distributor of Great Wall vehicles – says exciting times lie ahead for the Chinese automotive industry in the Kingdom.

Peang Mann, who also is the CEO of WMC, says recent developments are paving the way for the increased presence of Chinese vehicles on the Kingdom's roads.

Changing perceptions among Cambodians of Chinese automakers – coupled with even more competitive pricing and generous after-sales – will result in many more cars from the Asian giant being bought, he says.

"The main negative view was that Chinese cars are low priced and must therefore be lower quality. However, people are increasingly starting to realise that the quality of Chinese vehicles is at least as good if not better than other products on the market," Mann says.

With the demand for Chinese cars increasing, WMC plans to open a new 33-50ha assembly plant in Prey Veng province near the Vietnamese border this year, with technological assistance from Great Wall and its other marques to ensure every car is of the highest quality before it reaches the customer.

"The plant has the capacity to assemble 50,000 cars a year. We hope to initially assemble 500 to 1,000 units a year in the first few years, but this will increase as more investors come on board," Mann says.

Additionally, Great Wall buying General Motors' factory in Thailand will ease expansion into



The H6's stylish dashboard is packed with digital technology.



The build quality of our Chinese vehicles is at least on par with those from Japanese, Korean, American or German manufacturers, with many of these being made in China

PEANG MANN / WMC CHAIRMAN

untapped markets in Asean – including Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos – and increase market share in the countries it already works in – including Cambodia – along with Malaysia and Indonesia, where it already has great traction, he adds.

WMC, which sells a comprehensive range of Chinese vehicles – including Great Wall saloons and pick-ups, SUVs from Haval, Zotye, Huanghai, Traum and FAW, as well as BAW minivans – began operations in 2013.

Prices range from \$20,700 for the Great Wall Voleex C30 four-door saloon to \$45,000-\$68,000 for the Haval H6, and up to \$73,000 for the premium Haval H9 SUV. The H9 is a large, capable and well-specified seven-seater



The H6's interior is laid out in luxurious leather.

that is packed with a raft of high-end and luxury features, and comes at a reasonable price.

With word quickly spreading of their high build quality, WMC saw

a 60 per cent increase in sales of Chinese cars last year compared to 2018, up to some 500 from around 300.

Mann is committed to helping

Cambodians own new cars, and he says his vehicles have the lowest down payments available in the Kingdom, at 15 to 20 per cent, and generous after-care, with free yearly servicing for the duration of the financing and five- to seven-year warranties.

He called on banks to assist him in this goal by supplying greater credit options to both buyers and distributors, and invited more investors to come on board.

Mann said the build quality of Chinese cars was reflected in their safety scores. "Haval and other brands have been awarded the maximum 5-Star ANCAP [Australian New Car Assessment Program] safety rating.

"The build quality of our Chinese vehicles is at least on par with those from Japanese, Korean, American or German manufacturers, with many of these being made in China," he says.

Indeed, perceptions of the build quality of Chinese vehicles have been changing for some time.

Robin Page, the senior vice-president of design at Volvo, said back in 2018 that the quality of Chinese manufacturing was impressive after the Swedish carmaker opted to build vehicles in China.

"What we're finding is that the quality of the cars is actually better in China than in Europe. Everyone was worried about quality, but as soon as [the Chinese] started, the quality was even higher than in Europe," Page told Australia's Go Auto.

Mann is confident that the cars sold by WMC are more than a match for any other.

"People are increasingly becoming aware of how attractive Chinese cars are due to their design, range of features and build quality. Try a Chinese car and you will see for yourself how good they are," he says. ■