

## China battery company launches plug-in hybrid car

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer © 2008 The Associated Press

Dec. 15, 2008, 6:39AM

SHANGHAI, China — Battery maker turned car company BYD Co. has launched China's first homegrown hybrid vehicle for the retail market, seeking an edge over its crisis-stricken international rivals.

BYD presented the vehicle, known as the F3DM, in a ceremony in the southern city of Shenzhen, where local officials have pledged to buy some of the cars in support of the project.

The vehicle can run up to 100 kilometers (62 miles) on its electric engine, and when it runs low on power shifts to a back up gasoline engine. Its battery can fully charge in nine hours from a regular electrical outlet, or much faster at BYD's own charging stations, the company said in a statement.

The car will sell for 149,800 yuan (\$22,000), about the same as many Chinese-made mid-sized cars, it said.

Although the car is just now hitting the market, BYD claims to have leapfrogged larger automakers to be the first company to commercialize plug-in hybrid technology, which allows the batteries of the F3DM — DM stands for dual mode — to be recharged without any

special infrastructure.

General Motors Corp.'s own plug-in electric car, the Chevrolet Volt, is due to roll out in late 2010. Toyota Motor Corp. also is pushing to get a plug-in electric vehicle to market in 2010, while Ford Motor Co., says it is five years away from producing them in significant numbers.

Still, developing a safe plug-in has been a major challenge for automakers, and it was unclear what sort of standards the BYD vehicle had met.

BYD, a private company based in Shenzhen, started out as a maker of rechargeable batteries. Its foray into electric car manufacturing drew broader attention recently when MidAmerican Energy Holdings Co., a unit of Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Inc., invested in a 9.9 percent stake in the company.

Encouraged by government support for alternative fuel technologies, BYD — whose name stands for "build your dreams" — has pressed ahead with developing electric vehicles, despite weakening sales in China and elsewhere.

The company has said it plans to export the cars to the United States, but its vehicles must first meet stringent U.S. safety standards — a requirement that so far has deterred other, better-known local automakers.

Eager to limit its fast-growing dependence on the crude oil imports needed to fuel its growing legions of autos, and to limit choking emissions, China is pursuing a medley of programs aimed at putting new energy buses and other vehicles on

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Last week, China's Ministry of Science and Technology and the U.S. Department of Energy agreed to collaborate on alternative fuel vehicles, focusing on battery performance, testing and evaluation — areas bound to dovetail well with BYD's own approach.

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BYD Co.: <http://www.byd.com>

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