

D20 hatchback leads Chinese onslaught

 By [Henrie Geyser](#)

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Chinese automaker, Beijing Automotive Group (BAIC), has begun its onslaught on the local car market with the introduction of a new D20 hatchback and sedan ahead of early 2018 when the company's R11bn production and assembly plant in South Africa is expected to turn out the first locally produced BAIC vehicles.



At the recent media introduction, BAIC showed both versions of the new D20 and announced that the 5-model hatchback (fully imported at this stage) will lead the charge. The hatchback is attractively priced from R149,990 to R209,990 which makes it strongly competitive in its segment.

No low-budget

Even though the D20 is competitively priced it is no low-budget, soulless commuter chariot. The nifty hatch has plenty of European character with strong hints of the original Mercedes-Benz B-Class on which it is based.

By agreement with the German three-star manufacturer, the D20 also rides on the same basic platform that Mercedes uses for its Smart ForFour.

The BAIC (pronounced “bike”) D20 hatchback will be available in two specifications: ‘comfort’ and ‘fashion’ and even the

least expensive, entry-level 'comfort' variants have standard kit such as a leather-trimmed steering wheel, reverse alert, power windows, height adjustable headlights and fog lights.

The 'fashion' trim models have all of the above plus a sunroof, daytime running lights, aircon, elegant alloy wheels, folding side mirrors, and a high-class audio system with a 6.5 touch screen, CD player, GPS, USB, radio and six speakers.

On to the inside

The cabin of the hatchback feels airy, comfortable and user-friendly and it has a rear seat that splits 60:40 and a backrest that can be folded flat to provide 1190 litres of load space.



Occupant safety is also well looked after with front airbags, ABS with EBD, child safety locks, two ISOFIX child seat mountings, automatic fuel cut-off and height-adjustable headlights.

The D20 offers two engine options – a 1.3-litre which produces 75kW and 128Nm and a 1.5-litre engine that kicks out 85kW and 148Nm, both linked to a five-speed manual box. The two top models in the range have four-speed auto boxes.

Both the hatchback and sedan were on display at the local media introduction and both variants impressed with the smart European looks, perceived build quality and spacious, comfortable interiors.

Initial impressions of the D20 were very favourable and it scores well in most key departments. However, this was just a static viewing and the real test will come behind the wheel and on the road.

An added attraction

At its current prices, the D20 hatchback range compares favourably with others and its “newness” will no doubt be an added attraction.

BAIC is currently establishing a chain of 21 dealerships in key cities in South Africa and showroom floors should soon have the new hatchbacks on display and in stock.

The BAIC manufacturing plant is being constructed (in partnership with the Industrial Development Corporation) in the Coega Industrial Development Zone in Port Elizabeth and full production is expected to commence next year.

Prices

The models and prices of the new BAIC D20 (which include a five-year/120 000km warranty) are:

- D20 Hatch 1.3 M/T Comfort - R149,990
- D20 Hatch 1.5 M/T Comfort –R168,990
- D20 Hatch 1.5 M/T Fashion – R179,990
- D20 Hatch 1.5 A/T Fashion – R189,990
- D20 Sedan 1.5 A/T – R209,990

ABOUT HENRIE GEYSER

Henrie Geyser joined the online publishing industry through iafrica.com, where he worked for five years as news editor and editor. He now freelances for a variety of print and online publications, on the subjects of cars, food, and travel, among others; and is a member of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists. henrieg@iafrica.com

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