

SUVs in India now **S**eriously **U**ltrahot **V**ehicles!

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New Delhi: Oil-guzzling SUVs may be a four-letter word in pollution-hit Delhi but they were the flavour of the season at the country's biggest auto extravaganza that kicked off here on Wednesday. Almost all automobile manufacturers, from Maruti and Hyundai to

BMW and Mercedes-Benz, unveiled off-roaders, with Jeep making a debut.

Indians' love for the adrenaline-laced, macho vehicles

has triggered a rush among companies, resulting in a range of options, from mini sub-4 metres to the full-bloo-

ded all-wheel drive (4X4s) by the luxury carmakers.

Starting from Rs 6 lakh for the SUV-styled mini vehicles, prices can run up to Rs 1 crore and more for the tough ones.

Maruti, the country's biggest automaker, virtually set the tone for the day when it opened the show at the Greater Noida expo centre with

the 'Vitara Brezza', a mini-SUV that it hopes will help it get a foothold in the fast-growing segment. The car, to be launched in a few months, has been developed with an eye on the Indian market and the aspiration of middle-class buyers for off-roaders.

► **Jeep debuts, P 24**

Good ol' Jeep powers into Indian market

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New Delhi: Here's a deal many Indians have been waiting for: Jeep, the iconic American SUV brand, debuted in the Indian market on Wednesday as it unveiled the 'Wrangler' and the 'Grand Cherokee' in a market that seems to be in love with off-roaders.

The company has long been eyeing an entry into the Indian market, but troubles at home and a not-so-conducive economic environment in India had led to postponement. "The timing is just right," Jim Morrison, global director for the Jeep's product marketing, told **TOI** here.

"Coming to India has been a dream, we'd been waiting for this moment for long," Morrison said, adding that the initial entry through imported vehicles marks the beginning of a long innings which will see the company start local assembly at parent Fiat's Pune plant from next year.

The idea is to gradually churn out affordable models.

Considered the originators of the SUV and off-road category, Jeep will drive in power-packed models, though the exact pricing will be known closer to the launch later in the year. The Grand Cherokee will come strapped with a 3,000cc diesel engine; the Wrangler will carry a 2,800cc engine. Both these diesel models cannot be sold in the Delhi-NCR region till March-end due to a Supreme Court ban on vehicles carrying diesel engines above 2,000cc.

The company will also launch vehicles with a 3,600cc petrol engine and this will help it launch the models in the critical Delhi-NCR market if the ban continues.

But while being a revered brand with those in love with the rough terrain, Jeep's entry has been preceded by off-roaders from the stable of Mercedes Benz, BMW,



Audi and Land Rover. Morrison said competition isn't something new for the brand and this is a phenomenon across the world. "We are the original SUV makers and are proud of our legacy. There is a class of people in India who appreciate our brand and we are confident that more will join in."

The company has already announced investment of \$280 million in the country for manufacturing vehicles and this should begin from next year. Sales will be through Jeep dealerships at Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Cochin. In the next phase, outlets will be opened at Kolkata, Lucknow and Chandigarh.



Grand Cherokee

Jeep debuts with 'Wrangler' & 'Grand Cherokee'

► From P 1

Close rival Hyundai followed the act, unveiling the 'Tucson' SUV which will make a debut later in the year. The Korean company, which counts India as its fastest-growing market globally and has been basking in the "success" of the 'Creta' SUV, seems to have gone on an overdrive. Alongside Tucson, Hyundai unveiled a new concept mini-SUV which will hit the market over the next three years. "Indians just love SUVs and we are prepared to offer more," Hyundai India MD YK Koo said.

Tata Motors, which is desperately looking to turn around its passenger vehicle business, showcased two new SUVs in the 'Hexa' and the 'Nexon'. The vehicles will be launched over the coming months.

Mahindra & Mahindra, which has suffered due to the ban on diesel engines above 2-litres in Delhi, had the mini KUV100 to showcase along with another recent launch, the TUV300.

And as if to reinforce the sentiment, iconic American SUV maker Jeep decided to make a debut at the Expo. The company came out with the much-revered 4x4 'Wrangler' and 'Grand Cherokee' off-roaders and promised to offer "nothing but the original SUV" to the Indian market. The SUVs, which will be imported to the market and carrying performance-packed engines (3,600cc petrol and 3,000cc diesel), will cost upwards of Rs 50 lakh.

BMW drove in the new 'X1' SUV in the market, and added star-power to the event by getting in batting legend Sachin Tendulkar.

Jaguar, the British luxury brand owned by Tata Motors, also displayed its 'F-Pace' SUV at the Expo. "It will make a debut in India soon, though a time cannot be confirmed now," a company official said.

Mercedes Benz also unveiled the GLC SUV at the Expo, and this will be launched in the second half of the year. The 2-litre petrol engine model could cost Rs 50 lakh.