

Geely SA appoints new MD

Henri Mestre has been appointed managing director of Geely South Africa, the largest privately-owned Chinese car manufacturer's South African affiliate. Mestre is a 20-year veteran of the South African motor industry, who brings with him an in-depth knowledge of the Chinese automotive industry and its product.

Armed with a B.Com degree from the University of Johannesburg, Mestre joined WesBank as a senior business development manager before spending several years with Hyundai as a marketing executive. This was followed by a spell running his own dealer retail company, which is still in business today, and has held various franchises including Daewoo/SsangYong, Kia, Subaru, Daihatsu and GWM.

Gateway to Africa

"There's been a very real change in Geely's approach to the global automotive market and they've adapted their strategy accordingly. They see themselves as a global and not just a Chinese company and they have a refreshing approach to global business. South Africa is an important market to them. They see us as the gateway to the rest of Africa.

"We've got good momentum going at Geely South Africa," he says. "We started small with the LC and now we're building up to a new product launch at almost six monthly intervals. Introducing new product twice a year will allow us time between launches to evaluate and fine tune, to get each product properly established. Our next new product is the SC5 before year-end, a 1 500 hatch that will compete in an aggressive segment of the market against the likes of the VW Polo Vivo, Ford Figo and Renault Sandero.

2013 will see first SUV

"Next year we'll see the EC7 sedan, which is a serious value-for-money product and the first car from China to be awarded the Euro NCAP 4-star safety standard. Towards the end of 2013 we plan to introduce our first SUV, the GX7, which was launched at this year's Beijing Motor Show.

On Geely South Africa's immediate plans to build and strengthen its dealer network, he acknowledges that there is still much work to do. "We have a small, young and enthusiastic team with a very important job to do. For a young and growing small Chinese car company in South Africa we have a surprisingly strong dealer network of 37.

On the link with Volvo Cars, which Geely bought in 2010 for US\$1.8 billion, Mestre says the benefits are coming through, mostly in terms of technology transfer and safety features. "There is an important transfer of skills between the two companies and Geely product can only benefit, particularly in the critical area of passenger safety."

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