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Luxury Car Market Booming

By Roland Oliphant

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The Marussia B2 sports car is being featured in an online video game. **Yana Soboleva**

Correction appended

Appetite for luxury cars in Russia is such that the country could "easily" be on course to become one of the biggest markets for Rolls Royce.

Speaking at the opening of Rolls Royce's second Moscow showroom Wednesday, general director Torsten Muller-Oetvoes said sales in the country more than doubled in 2011 compared with those in 2010.

The company sold a record 3,538 vehicles worldwide in 2011, and Russia is already the brand's largest market in continental Europe, ranking only behind China, the United States, Britain and the Middle East.

He declined to give country-specific sales figures, however, on the grounds that "customers don't like it."

The showroom, run by the Avilon dealership on Volgogradsky Prospekt, is Rolls Royce's second in Russia. The company opened a dealership with MusaMotors in the city center in 2004.

Demand for the cars, which Muller-Oetvoes described as "not as a form of transport, but as something you buy to spoil your soul," is so strong that the firm may consider opening new dealerships in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, he said.

Muller-Oetvoes attributed the sales boom both in Russia and globally to the launch in 2009 of the Ghost series, a car for successful businesspeople "that you drive yourself" and is less expensive than the iconic Phantom series.

Ghost models on display at Avilon's showroom Wednesday retail from between 15 million and 18 million rubles ($464,000 to $557,000) depending on modifications, said Avilon general director Andrei Pavlovich.

By contrast, models of the Phantom Series II, which the company plans to present at the Moscow auto show later this summer, are likely to be priced in the region of 25 million rubles.

Rolls Royce Motor Cars is owned by BMW and is separate from Rolls Royce PLC, a defense, aerospace and power systems firm.

Last month, rival luxury car brand Bentley launched a new sales company, Bentley Russia, to expand its presence in the country. The brand said it saw a 45 percent jump in sales last year.

Meanwhile, Marussia, Russia's first home-grown luxury car producer, got a recognition boost this week when it was announced that its B2 sports model would be featured in the "Need for Speed World" online video game.

The B2 will go on sale next year with a price tag of 100,000 euros ($126,000).

Correction: An earlier version of this article misstated the last name of Avilon's general director. His last name is Pavlovich, not Petrovich.

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