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Homegrown Luxury Car Fails to Excite

By Anatoly Medetsky

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The passenger zone of the ZiL 4112P has a bar and seating for four.

The plan to mass-produce a Russian luxury car has elicited little, if any, enthusiasm from the companies that are supposed to be hard at work to make it happen.

None of the three carmakers the government asked for manufacturing proposals signaled that it was excited about the idea Thursday.

ZiL spokeswoman Tatyana Lomakina said that for the time being the company is focused on developing an armored presidential limousine. ZiL could, however, rethink the approach to appeal to a broader market than just heads of state.

"If the Industry and Trade Ministry asks, we will perhaps give it a try," she said.

A GAZ Group spokeswoman declined comment on the project until the government made its choice of carmaker.

A Marussia Motors spokesman said only that the sports car manufacturer is working on the

proposal.

Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov said the government's efforts to make Russia-branded top-class vehicles target a broader market than just the country's president and other top officials, Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported Wednesday.

"In addition to a presidential limousine, Project Motorcade stipulates two more product lines," Manturov said in an interview with the government's official newspaper. "One of them will be meant for government officials. A similar, tweaked model will be ... for high-volume sales."

The statement marked the first time Russia has raised the prospect of local competition to the likes of Jaguar and Porsche in a market where well-heeled customers increasingly hanker for high-end cars.

Sales of luxury cars grew last year, PricewaterhouseCoopers statistics show. While the consultant doesn't track the segment's value and numbers overall, it said Porsche sales were 3,613 vehicles, up 64 percent over the previous year, while Jaguar sold 1,506 cars, an increase of 27 percent.

The ministry asked Moscow-based ZiL and Marussia Motors and Nizhny Novgorod-based GAZ to submit proposals for models that would rival Western brands, promising state support for the project, Manturov said in the interview.

"We do not intend to let this lie on the shelf," he said. "I hope that by the end of this year's first half we will have a vision of what scenario we want to go with."

Project Motorcade took shape in October after President Vladimir Putin said he would prefer that Russian officials ride in domestically built automobiles.

ZiL already made an armored prototype model for the Kremlin boss, which has a 7.7-liter engine based on old technology. The maker of limousines for the Soviet Union's leaders produced at most 25 cars a year during its heyday, Lomakina said.

GAZ also produced an armored limousine as part of the project.

Manturov said last month that an effort to build a GAZ limousine, which uses existing Western components, would cost about 4 billion rubles (100 million euros).

Marussia would have to develop its model from scratch, which would make it more expensive — in the neighborhood of 15 billion rubles (375 million euros) — and push the start of production to 2015, he said.

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