

Thai assembly of Mazda2 under eco-car programme celebrated

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Mazda yesterday staged a ceremony marking the beginning of assembly of the all-new Mazda2 subcompact for export globally, making Thailand one of its three "new small car" production bases in the world after its homeland Japan and Mexico.

The Mazda2 is the first model to be produced under Phase 2 of the Thailand's eco-car scheme, which offers incentives and tax breaks for a minimum investment of Bt6.5 billion.

The 1.5-litre diesel version has been approved, while the 1.3-litre petrol version is being considered as an additional model. Mazda has invested Bt12.6 billion for the model, of which Bt9.7 billion was for an assembly line at the AutoAlliance (Thailand) plant in Rayong, which is a joint venture of Mazda Motor Corporation and Ford Motor Company.

The remaining Bt2.9 billion was for a factory for engine assembly and engine-components production.

Production capacity is 158,000 units per year for the Mazda2 - 120,000 completely built up and 38,000 completely knocked down - and 50,000 units per year for the Mazda3 and any other models.

Besides Mazda passenger cars, the AAT plant churns out the Ford Ranger and Mazda BT-50 pickup trucks for both domestic and global markets.

According to the requirements for Phase 2, which are stricter than for Phase 1, vehicles must show average fuel economy of 23.5 kilometres per litre, down from 20, carbon-dioxide emissions of no more than 100 grams per kilometre, down from 120, and international crash safety levels.

Production/export hub

Industry Minister Chakramon Pasukavanich said the Phase 2 programme had helped Thailand become a production and export hub not only for pickups but also for passenger cars.

"Last year Thailand was ranked ninth in the world for auto production, and Thai-made vehicles are now being exported to countries with very high standards such as Japan and Germany," he said. Yuji Nakamine, director and senior managing executive officer of Mazda Motor Corp, said Mazda was ramping up its presence in Thailand. Next year, a new factory will start producing transmissions in January for AAT and overseas assembly plants, while the engine plant will start up in the fourth quarter.

"Production capacity at AAT has been raised dramatically, and this means a lot to Mazda. We are planning to increase sales both in Thailand and overseas markets," he said.

"Thailand will become a very strong manufacturing base for Mazda in the future.

"The local production of the Mazda2 will elevate the technical standards of the Thai automobile industry through collaboration with a lot of local parts suppliers.

"Since the Mazda2 is a highly competitive global model, it will make a big contribution to the growth of the local automobile industry as an export model," Nakamine said.

The Thai-made Mazda2 will premiere on the world market in Australia, with a public launch this month. Production and export figures have not been finalised. They will be revealed during the Mazda2's soft launch at the Thailand International Motor Expo this month.