

Blatant Knockoffs Stun Westerners

By Vince Courtenay

Representatives from the big global car companies were delighted when tens of thousands of visitors crushed into their display areas at the recent Beijing auto show to ooh and ah over their vehicles on opening day Nov. 18.

But some of the Western officials were taken aback when they visited the exhibits of the smaller Chinese auto makers and found vehicles that were the spitting image of their own hard-developed, proprietary models.

For instance, one General Motors Corp. executive from Detroit strolled outside Exhibit Hall 8 to get some air and spotted a Chevrolet Colorado pickup truck that seemed very much out of place. It was surrounded by Chinese

words in a small outside display booth. It had chromed Chinese symbols on the hood and tailgate and the Chevrolet bowtie logo was missing.

Yet he swore it was the Colorado—and it was, in a way. It was a perfect knockoff of the model, produced and sold by the Huanghai Auto unit of Liaoning SG Automotive Group based in Dandong, Liaoning province.

Before the day was over, virtually every GM executive on site had taken a close look at what they collectively agree is a perfect Chinese copy of the Colorado.

Some shrugged it off. Others were incensed.

What they were looking at is the “4-door Plutus DD 1020L with luxury sedan type inner decoration.”

The Plutus is offered only with 2-wheel drive and is powered by either a “Toyota (Motor Corp.) technology”

2.2L 4-cyl. engine or a 3.2L First Auto Works diesel mill billed as “Germany modern technology.” It can seat five with two bucket seats forward and a rear bench.

Both the diesel and gas versions are equipped with 5-speed manual transmissions. The 3.2L diesel develops 102 hp at 3,400 rpm with maximum torque of 181 lb.-ft. (245 Nm) at 2,200 to 2,600 rpm, according to published specifications.

SG Automotive Group says it is serious about exporting the knockoff, though details about those plans are scarce.

The Plutus copy of the Colorado also is available in a somewhat modified version called the Steed, which has a smaller 2.8L diesel engine.

One of the features on the Steed and the other versions of the Colorado copycat is the “Hummer locked differential.”

More shocked than the GM officials at finding the copycat vehicle with a Chinese nameplate were Hyundai Motor Co. Ltd. officials.

There on the floor was a knockoff of their top-selling Santa Fe CUV, complete with a look-alike Hyundai logo.

Other knockoffs at the show included an obvious clone of GM’s Hummer and rough imitations of some BMW AG models, which have a BMW-like logo modified only by the Chinese maker’s closely matching initials, BYW, for BYW Motors.

Under Chinese law, manufacturers are allowed to copy any vehicle as long as proprietary technology data hasn’t been stolen, GM Asia Pacific President Nick Reilly says.

Reprinted from the Dec. 2006 issue of *Ward’s AutoWorld*.