Changan Deepal SO5 Ultra Phev – First Impressions

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Author:

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Robin Roberts (WheelsWithinWales) writes...

Barely six months after launching its first mid-sized SUV pure electric model in Britain, China's latest entrant has just strengthened and doubled its offering with the introduction of the plug-in hybrid derivative which has a range extender petrol generator.

The Changan Deepal SO5 Ultra Phev is now on sale as the Birmingham based importer seeks to widen its appeal and offer an electric-petrol powertrain with a combined range of 648 miles.

Using sophisticated software tuned in its Birmingham R&D centre for British and European roads, the petrol and electric systems "talk" to each other and decide which is better for any particular driving situation.

Initially it starts in EV mode but then how a driver uses the car will determine if and when the petrol motor comes into play, and the system can be over-ridden to run in zero

emissions mode in urban areas or both systems combine to give maximum power. It will also perform with petrol only power, so any range anxiety over buying an EV can be left at the plug or pump.

Deepal SO5 is fitted with a lithium iron phosphate 18.4 kWh battery good for 62 miles between recharging and so it has strong appeal to owners who are not ready or need to go fully electric for every journey but know it will be 80% charged in 15 mins.

The Deepal SO5 Pro costs £32,990 and the Max is £34,990, which gets you a tiltable 15.4-inch touchscreen, head-up display, heated wheel and front seats with ventilation, 64-colour ambient lighting and 50W wireless phone charger together with 14 speakers in the cabin.

Both come with mobile telephony compatibility, on-line navigation, over-the-air updates, voice control, all-round camera with transparent chassis view to assist parking and standard dashcam. They have a seven-year/ 100,000 miles warranty and eight-year/ 124,000 mile battery cover with initial three-year roadside breakdown cover.

The Deepal SO5 SUV is fitted with a 172 kW permanent magnet synchronous motor and backed up with a 63 kW four-cylinder 1.5 litre petrol engine developed in Birmingham which can give it a 0-62mph time under eight seconds and maximum 112 mph.

After beginning as a munitions manufacturer in 1862 and then military vehicles in 1959, Changan eased into cars 25 years later and has worked with Suzuki, Mazda and Ford to develop models for its home market. By 2006 it was making its own models and from 2017 began concentrating on new energy vehicles with electric powertrains with a lot of technology incorporated as well.

Changan entered the UK market in 2025 with the bigger SO7 model and now this has been joined by the SO5 SUV and will be followed with a smaller electric car, the Nevo, in about a year. There is also the Avatr premium series and Kaicene van, which could be food for thought and concern among the CV manufacturers.

As if they are not enough, the company's portfolio also runs to city cars and an electric-petrol 4×4, but we don't yet know which models Changan UK will concentrate on. It is, nevertheless, tantalising to think what might be coming and when.

They will be no surprise to the Changan UK 100 engineers based in Birmingham who are developing the new powertrains after a £22 Million investment in British R&D, or the Turin external styling centre, home to 300 specialists, the Yokohama, Japan interior styling studio and Detroit autonomous driving facility. They have 24,000 people on payrolls.

Recently, Deepal has been considering where to establish a vehicle assembly plant in Europe to bring it closer to its rising customer base and also help bypass EU sanctions and tariffs, and which other Chinese car makers are looking into.

Changan sold 2.9 Million vehicles in 2025, including a million EVs through 14,000 dealers worldwide including four in Wales and 60 this year in Britain, while Europe is their most important region.

First impressions

The Deepal SO5 PHEV shares the SUV bodystyle of its petrol stablemates but is front wheel drive and has a lot of footspace in the back with a boot which extends from 552 to 1,310 litres (19.49 to 46.26.cu.ft), more than the RWD petrol version.

The access and deep seats were very good and comfortable, the boot easy to load or empty, while drivers will appreciate the simplicity of the controls, their ease of operation and clarity of instruments either ahead of the driver or contained in the big infotainment panel with its swivel setting.

You simply use the column drive direction stalk, and the steering was effortless, brakes reassuring and secondary switches were convenient.

The Deepal SO5 was fairly comfortable but we would have preferred more compliant

damping on some bad surfaces and better sound deadening of road noises. Engine noise was minimal.

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Verdict

The technology in the Deepal SO5 PHEV is very good, particularly in this price sector, has no serious shortcomings and represents good value which no potential buyer could afford to overlook.

