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Skywell BE11 FD Long Range – First Impressions

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Private buyers who want a high specification electric car and business drivers with eyes fixed on a low tax penalty are targets for the new Skywell range arriving in Britain, writes Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales).

The Cirencester-based importer, Innovation Automotive, is also looking at traditional used car dealers seeking their first new car franchise in a local market area where they are already highly regarded. Seven dealers have been appointed and they want to reach 50 before 2026.

The Skywell BE11 is the first model from the brand created with the joint venture of consumer electronics groups, Skyworth, and electric bus maker Nanjing Golden Dragon, and it uses an electric motor and powertrain from the more familiar BYD group, who started selling their own cars in Britain early in 2024.

Skywell's first model is an SUV, similar in size to the Ford Mach E, Skoda Enyaq, Nissan Ariya and KGM Torres EVX. The new brand will eventually add the Q Hatchback and then venture into the lucrative but highly cost conscious light van market from the end of 2025.

Skywell has carefully studied the UK market, existing rivals and built up an extensive import centre operation for the cars and parts near Doncaster. It aims to use a major logistics firm for overnight delivery of most parts and is even prepared to fly-in components from China if essential.

The new cars will be sold with a 7 years mechanical warranty good for 100,000 miles, but the nickel-manganese-cobalt lithium ion battery pack is covered for 8 years or 150,000 miles.

There will be two front-wheel-drive only models initially, with 72 kWh battery good for about 248 miles and 86 kWh powerpack with a 304 miles range from £36,995 and £39,995 respectively.



Servicing will be fixed price and the models come with AA Breakdown cover which renews at each service for up to ten years.

Standard equipment on either version is common and includes intelligent LED headlights, rear privacy glass, big sunroof, powered mirrors and tailgate, powered front seats, 128-colours interior lighting, wireless mobile phone compatibility, Metz Sound, leather and alcantara upholstery, parking rear camera and sensors, cruise control and large instruments' displays.

The 'razor' LED headlights help identify the car, along with chrome accents and 19in diamond-cut alloy wheels, and there's a full-width LED light bar with illuminated brand lettering.

Skywell said the newcomer's ride and handling has been developed for the UK market and the equipment list is what you'd expect on a rival costing a lot more money, but it still anticipated the cars holding about 43% of their value after three years.

Our first introduction to the Skywell BE11 was on a chilly morning in the south Midlands where the heated seats were appreciated together with the large sunroof.

With the larger battery the acceleration was fairly good considering its pulling over 2.2 tonnes and it easily kept up with traffic on main roads and a short stretch of motorway.

The BE11's ride was acceptable on the motorway and better maintained main roads but on secondary stretches and frost-potholed minor roads it was bumpier.

While it absorbed most shocks fairly well, the shock absorber damping was too firm for our liking and quicker corners produced noticeable body roll with the front scrambling for grip as well.

It was nicely equipped for everyday use and very roomy throughout, with a decent boot but a bit of a fiddle to drop down the back seat to triple capacity.



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The touch screen was not very intuitive and speed of selected view was poor.



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Unlike its rivals, the BE11 is not equipped with the latest autodriving features for lane control and distance protection so expect it to score a low mark if evaluated by European or British safety testers, unless Skywell add these ADAS features.

On the move, pickup was good and a driver can select the amount of regenerative braking returning charge to the battery to add range.

We thought the steering was a bit lifeless and the brakes also lacked feedback but the parking brake did its job on a few slopes we found.

You have standard, comfort and sport modes to play with but we found only minor feelings of change between them.

VERDICT

The Skywell BE11 is a reasonable first attempt at entering the UK market but it is in a tough sector where its next models will have to improve.

For: Very roomy, highly equipped, average range, very good warranties and breakdown cover.

Against: Too-strong suspension damping, fiddly infotainment, lots of road noise.



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Model: Skywell BE11 long range

Price: £39,995

Mechanical: 201 bhp, 86 kWh battery, front wheel drive

Max Speed: 93 mph

0 - 62 mph: 9.6 secs

Range: 304 miles

Insurance Group: TBA

C02 emissions: Zero

Bik rating: 2%, £ZeroFY, £180SR

Warranty: 7 years/100,000 miles & 8 years/155,000 miles battery

Size: L 4.72 m (15.49 ft), W 1.91 m (6.27 ft), H 1.70 m (5.58 ft)

Bootspace: 467 to 1,141 litres (16.49 to 40.29 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 2,255 kg (4,971 kg)