# Smart moves ahead…

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## smart thinking on the way forward –  by Dave Moss

smart has come a long way since the early 1980s, when the idea of the compact car which came to carry the name first began to take hold, born of growing concerns over congestion and urban air pollution. Production versions of the model we now recognise as the fortwo eventually emerged – after a very lengthy and troubled gestation – through a partnership

between Daimler and head of the Swatch Group, Nicolas G Hayek, whose idea it originally was. Interestingly, Hayek's vision was for a purely battery-powered zero-emission small car….

The public debut of the petrol-powered smart "City-Coupé" finally came at the 1997 IAA Frankfurt Motor show, and it entered LHD-only production the following year, with RHD examples following a while later. By then it was much changed from the original concept, though the fortwo's distinctive, ultra compact silhouette has since become instantly familiar. It was joined by the larger forfour model in 2004, along with a stylish but short-lived Roadster.

The forfour and fortwo have seen useful development over the years, with key moments including the arrival of the cabriolet fortwo, and the option of a small diesel engine rather than the remarkably diminutive petrol unit in both versions. It proved extremely economical, stretching fuel consumption towards the elusive 100 mpg mark in suitable conditions. Though ultimately something of an acquired taste, both models have held their appeal through changing times, and SMMT figures reveal that by 2017 smart was selling over 10,000 cars a year in the UK. However, the years since then have been times of seismic upheaval in the automotive business, and the products were ageing even before the disruptive storms of Covid began. By 2019 the marque's full year UK sales were down to just 4,022 cars – and European sales were also in decline.

smart urgently needed reinvigoration through a new beginning – and it duly arrived with the establishment of the smart Automobile Co. Ltd in March that year – as a 50:50 joint venture, between Mercedes-Benz AG and the China-based Geely Automobile Group. Headquartered in Hangzhou Bay, Ningbo, China, it was formed to produce a new generation of cars – in response to growing market demand for sustainable urban mobility.

Amongst the new company's first announcements was news of an intention to abandon internal combustion engines, with future vehicles being all-electric – turning the smart wheel full circle, back to the original vision of Nicolas Hayek. Future model lines will be

styled by the Mercedes-Benz Design network, engineered by Geely and a specialist smart research and development team in Germany, and built at a new, purpose-designed electric car factory in China. Not only will the marque's future course match its creator's original vision – it will build on an electric vehicle lineage already traceable back ten years, when a 100-strong prototype development fleet of all-electric fortwos appeared in London. A production version duly emerged in 2011 – and developments of it have been on sale ever since, although they will not be related to any future vehicles.

The new company's ambition is to evolve the marque into a world-leading, premium all-electric car and technology brand, driven by a China-based global sales and marketing operation, which is already operational. Alongside it, smart Europe GmbH has been established as a wholly owned subsidiary near Stuttgart, responsible for sales, marketing and after-sales activities in European markets.

Last February, smart unveiled its new model line terminology, saying the chosen combination of the "#" symbol and a number defines a "recognizable new vehicle generation family name". The new company believes that technology, connectivity and user-oriented features are the keys to today's mobility – and the extent of the culture shift the marque is undergoing was demonstrated on April 7th, when an all-new, all-electric compact SUV, to be known as the smart #1, was unveiled in Berlin…

This all-new car is designed around a dedicated app environment and customisable infotainment interface, which smart claims "…embraces purposeful and human-centric technology, to connect people, places, and experiences." Built-in AI-based voice control ties into both the car's interconnected technical infrastructure and connected products and services, which, its said, "form one coherent, intuitive, and adapting ecosystem." Centralised computing architecture allows over 75% of the electronic control units to receive "over the air" updates – with smart claiming the car's advanced technologies act as enabler for a worry-free electric mobility experience.



Until the vehicle completes homologation later in 2022, only key outline details are available. It's known the smart#1 will be 4.27 metres (14 ft 11 in) long – slightly shorter than the latest Peugeot 2008, though wider at 1.822 metres, (5 ft 11 in) and taller at 1.636 metres. (5 ft 4 in) As with most current electric vehicles it's no lightweight, weighing 1,820kg (4,012 lbs) and it will offer a maximum payload of just 450 kg, (992 lbs) with loadspace quoted at 411 litres (14.5 cu ft). It's powered by a single electric motor driving the rear wheels, with a claimed 200 kW peak motor performance, maximum torque of 343 Nm (253 lb.ft), and 112 mph top speed. Its claimed the 66kwH battery pack will offer a 420–440 km (260–273 miles) WLTP range, and is capable of 10-80% 22kW AC charging in 3 hours, with 150kW DC super-fast charging taking under 30 minutes.

Asked for vehicle comparisons, David Browne, Chief Executive Officer of smart UK Automotive Ltd., points to the current Hyundai Kona BEV as slightly smaller but with a similar bodystyle, and the Mini Clubman, with similar exterior dimensions but a very different powertrain – and, adds Mr Browne, the smart is more spacious inside….

Safety systems include 7 airbags and comprehensive ADAS package, and the car is expected to undergo NCAP testing later this year. European deliveries are currently anticipated from

December, with UK availability midway through 2023. As yet there are no clues on UK pricing, though plans already exist to extend the product portfolio into the fast-growing B-segment quite soon, with further range expansion planned in future.

