

Close partnership:

Wang YuChun, Deputy General Manager, FAW-Car (center) presents one of the legendary Hongqi models to his guests. From left: Sales and Marketing Director Walter Liu (BASF Shanghai Coatings), Regional Marketing Manager Jack Zou (BASF Coatings Asia Pacific), FAW Account Manager Xia Weiguo (BASF Shanghai Coatings) and Mutsuo Aoki, Group Vice President, Regional Business Management Coatings Asia Pacific.

Looking for a specialist

Key partnership – BASF Shanghai Coatings has been cooperating with Chinese automaker FAW since 2000. The outlook is promising.



The luxury sedans provided to members of the Chinese government are called Hongqi, meaning ‘red flag’. China First Automobile Group Corporation (FAW), headquartered in Changchun, has produced these government vehicles since 1958. Today, Hongqi is the Group’s established luxury brand, and FAW, founded in 1953, is one of China’s biggest carmakers. The company’s rise began after the opening of the Chinese economy in the 1980s, heralding an era of increasing mobility in the country. FAW entered into joint ventures to meet demand, first with Volkswagen (VW) in 1991, followed by Toyota in 2002. FAW developed its own B-class sedan called the Besturn and is a licensed manufacturer of the Mazda 6 for the Chinese market. Roughly 80 percent of these

vehicles manufactured by the company received serial finishing from BASF Coatings and four BASF Coatings engineers are directly involved in on-site production during two shifts. The new Hongqi models also feature BASF Coatings finishes.

FAW and BASF Coatings first came into contact seven years ago. The coatings manufacturer had just begun supplying the FAW/VW plant in Changchun. The Chinese automobile market was flourishing, and FAW was investing to enhance factory productivity. BASF Coatings approached FAW immediately after learning about the FAW investment plan. “Quite honestly, we were facing a major challenge,” remembers Walter Liu, Sales and Marketing Director at BASF Shanghai Coatings. “BASF Shanghai was only three

years old, so having a second customer located more than two and a half hours away by plane confronted our small team with a big task.”

Real teamwork

A prompt staffing response saved the situation. Two fallback teams were formed, supervised by a sales manager. Each team consisted of one service and one laboratory technician to take turns in Changchun on a weekly basis. “We had real teamwork, allowing us to systematically organize our technical service,” recalls former lab technician Jack Zou, now Marketing Manager for BASF Coatings Asia Pacific. “The trick was to maintain sufficient continuity through briefings at the point of handover that the client didn’t



Growth: FAW has built two new plants since 2003. BASF Coatings helped design the coating lines.

notice any difference in technical service quality when the teams swapped places.” One round of testing followed another, first with a single vehicle, then for serial production; first with one finish and then with several different basecoat/clearcoat combinations. It wasn’t long until BASF Shanghai received the nod to supply a substantial portion of the serial vehicle finishes required by FAW.

The Chinese automobile market continues to grow, and FAW keeps on expanding. A licensing deal was signed in 2003 for production of the Mazda 6. “It was a really big moment for us,” says Wang YuChun, Deputy General Manager of FAW Car. With volume increasing, production facilities were in need of upgrading, which included replacing a coating

line from the 1990s. YuChun: “We again turned to BASF Coatings because of the experience we had had. They are an international firm of equal stature, able to provide professional technical support, especially when it comes to expanding plant and production capacity.” BASF Coatings also won out in competition against the former coatings manufacturer from Japan as a finish supplier for serial production of the Mazda 6.

Pioneering technologies

In 2006, FAW rolled out the Besturn sedan, designed in Italy. Collaboration with BASF Coatings was again sought to expand the range of colors for the car. At the moment, a new car factory with a coating line is being built. The idea is to employ

pioneering technologies for enhanced efficiency and eco-friendliness. The FAW paid a visit to the BASF Coatings technology centers in Japan and Germany to get direction on both fronts. Thus, technologies like waterborne coatings or integrated processes are attractive options. The outlook is promising for this partnership, as Wang YuChun notes: “We benefit from having the latest finishing technologies at our disposal. We see ourselves cooperating with BASF Coatings far down the road.” ■

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