

Lobini, Brazil's Answer to Fancy Sports Car, on the Road to the US

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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Brazil has gone back to producing sports cars. Last weekend, Lobini Automóveis, car factory located in the city of Cotia, in the great São Paulo city area, in the southeast of Brazil, delivered the first two units of the Lobini H1, car equipped with an 180-horsepower engine that may reach 240 kilometers per hour.

And it was already born with an international vocation. At the same time the company starts selling the vehicle in the country, the company is signing an exports contract to the United States.

"It is a product that looks to the foreign market. For its sophistication, it is comparable to the international sports cars," said the partner director of the company, Cláudio Peçanha.

According to him, Lobini's business plan foresees for the future an annual production between 100 and 150 units, which should be reached in 2007, with 60% directed for exports.

The agreement with the North American 1g Racing, which already trades sports cars in the United States, involves the delivery of one Lobini H1 for tests in October and the shipment of four cars per month as of the beginning of 2006, until they reach the total of 49.

"But they believe its possible to place up to 100 cars per year in the United States," says Peçanha. The businessman estimates the vehicle will cost US\$ 47,000 in the North American market.

The factory also has its eye on the European consumer and has even developed a chassis with the steering wheel on the right hand side, for business in England.

The English engineer Graham Holmes, who worked as a consultant in the project and has worked in other factories of the sort, such as Lotus, may become the brand's representative in the Old Continent, according to Peçanha.

He also doesn't discard possibilities in the Arab countries. After all, the idea is to sell the car in any part of the world. "But to reach the Middle East, I believe we will first have to have a certain amount of exposure in the United States and Europe," declared Peçanha.

In the internal scenario, the company accumulates 18 firm orders, including those that were delivered during the weekend. The car is only made on order and is part of a new fleet of national vehicles, directed at specific market niches. "We noticed there is space in Brazil for high level sports car," said Peçanha.

Enthusiasts

The Lobini H1 started to appear in the beginning of 1999, when the lawyer José Orlando Lobo got together with the engineer Fábio Birolini. From joining their surnames came the name Lobini.

Both of them very fond of cars, the first had the resources to give start to the enterprise the latter the technical knowledge to manufacture a totally national sports car.

The project was entirely conceived in Brazil and up to now has used up US\$ 2 million in investments. Peçanha, economist and also an engineer entered the business later as the business manager.

During the development of the project, the entrepreneurs counted on the services of the Federal University of São Carlos, in São Paulo, which carried out the tests with the model car in the wind tunnel, and of Chamonix, old Porsches replicas manufacturer, which built the first prototype.

The car was presented to the public for the first time during the International Car Salon in São Paulo, in 2002. At the occasion, according to Peçanha, 56 reservations were made, of which 18 were converted into strong orders.

At the end of last year, the businessmen rented an industrial shed in Cotia where the factory was installed. Today 25 people work in the company. Great part of the car's components is manufactured in Brazil.

The car is equipped with a four cylinder VW Audi 1.8 liter Turbo engine, chassis produced by the company itself and a fiberglass carcass.

Inspired in the English sports cars, the convertible, according to the manufacturer, speeds up from 0 to 100 km/h in less than six seconds. In Brazil it costs 157,500 reais (US\$ 64,700). When the factory's production is at full speed, Peçanha believes the company's revenue may reach US\$ 6.16 million.

Although the factory already counts on quite a few of series items, the factory gives the buyer the possibility of customizing the vehicle, choosing the color of the carcass and internal lining, including of the leather seats.

"We have more than 10,000 colors to choose from. There will not be two identical cars," says Peçanha. Only if, of course, the client wants it.

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