



At CES, Byton to show 1st "drivable prototype"

Chinese electric-vehicle start-up Byton will launch its first "drivable prototype" at the CES trade show in January.

The company, which started in 2016 as Future Mobility, said its cars will be positioned as "the next generation of smart devices for shared mobility and autonomous driving."

With its Las Vegas launch, Byton follows in the footsteps of Faraday Future, another Chinese start-up, which unveiled an ambitiously styled electric race car concept at CES in 2016. In 2017, FF showed a production car, but the company has in recent months been struggling financially.

Byton plans to build an SUV, a sedan and an MPV over the next five years, with the first production model scheduled to come to market in the fourth quarter of 2019.

The prototype it will show at CES in Las Vegas on January 7 will be a premium-segment intelligent car featuring a range of digital technologies and a vehicle-to-vehicle communication system. Among the features it is planning for its upcoming models are a car-wide 49 inch by 10 inch screen, a touch steering wheel and systems that recognize gestures, facial expressions and emotions.

Byton was co-founded by CEO Carsten Breitfeld and President Daniel Kirchert. Breitfeld developed BMW's i8 sports car, while Kirchert previously also held senior roles at BMW and Nissan's Infiniti brand.

Byton, which announced last week that its new, 80,000 square feet North American headquarters in Silicon Valley is now fully operational, has received funding from a series of Chinese companies, including internet giant Tencent and contract manufacturer Foxconn.

The company's North American headquarters employs 120 people and Byton plans to add another 200 in the next year. Breitfeld said the carmaker's California facilities will allow it to work on the right combination of automotive and digital technologies.

Said Breitfeld: "Silicon Valley's strength in technology and talent will provide powerful support for Byton's R&D endeavor in intelligent driving."

