

Car Cushion: Aesthetic upgrades stimulate buyer interest

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Knitting and embroidering workshops explore new pattern and textured panel designs, and use of traditional to vogue colors.

China suppliers of car seat covers and cushions are introducing aesthetic upgrades to stir buyer interest despite the lack of R&D breakthroughs in the line.

Backed by knitting and embroidering facilities, companies are playing with surface designs to create patterned and textured panels. Releases come in two- or three-color combinations for greater visual interest.

A single model can be offered in up to five different base colors. Options vary from the traditional black, blue, gray and red to hues not normally associated with the line, including purple, pink, orange and yellow.

Manufacturers are paying particular attention to the selection of colors.

Most consult with clients not only for design guidance but also to gauge the color preferences in key export destinations. By concentrating on popular hues, they hope to maximize growth opportunities in the aftermarket.

In terms of overall construction, companies are sticking to models that fit all car seat types. This is because shifting to custom-fit versions requires investment in advanced production machinery.

Currently, more than half of China-made car seat covers and cushions are suitable for universal use. Custom designs are manufactured only in small volumes. Suppliers are banking on such strategies to prop up business.

The decline in orders amid the economic recession has led to a 30 percent downturn in export sales. Shipments to North America, in particular, were hit hard. Some makers also incurred losses as the yuan appreciated 30 to 40 percent against the Australian dollar in the past six months.

More than 70 percent of the industry's output is exported, primarily under OEM or ODM contracts. The EU and the US together absorb three-fourths of shipments. Other key markets are Asia, the Middle East and Australia. Suppliers' client base consists mostly of importers and distributors, although some also work with large retailers.

Surface fabric, pad thickness settle price

Prices in the line depend primarily on the surface fabric. Various types are used, with PU leather and mesh the most common. Other options include velvet, suede, flax, wool, PVC and even bamboo for cushions. Almost all the material requirement is sourced domestically.

Padding thickness is another key differentiator, as adding a layer of foam pushes quotes up by \$0.50 to \$0.60.

Most China-made car seat covers range between \$5 and \$15. Models at the lower end of the price spectrum are made of mesh or PU leather and 1 to 2mm-thick foam.

Designs at \$11 to \$15 come in PU leather, sandwich mesh or pulled fabric. The padding measures 2 to 4mm thick. Genuine leather seat covers exceeding \$100 are also offered. But exports are still limited, with only a few companies engaged in production.

Targeted at the refitting market, such designs often need to be custom fit to strict size requirements. As most suppliers have yet to acquire this expertise, models from China lag behind foreign counterparts in terms of quality.

Pricewise, manufacturers have not gained an advantage as well. In the car cushions segment, quotes are from \$1 to \$20. Models below \$2 usually have a mesh exterior. PU leather or pulled fabric is adopted for versions priced up to \$4. Those between \$5 and \$6 are often made of PU or PVC leather.

Designs with health-benefiting functions reach \$10 to \$20. Shipped primarily to Japan and the EU, these are equipped with a heating system for thermal relief, and massage mechanisms aimed at the waist, back and hips.

Generally, China's car seat covers and cushions are priced 30 to 50 percent lower than versions from leading foreign suppliers.

Most companies interviewed for this report intend to maintain quotes in coming months as long as there are no significant adjustments in material costs and the yuan's value.

Zhejiang hosts 70% of suppliers

China's car cushions and seat covers industry has 500 or so manufacturers with an estimated combined capacity of 300 million pieces annually.

Companies, most of which are privately owned, offer other types of automotive interior accessories, including car and steering wheel covers, mats and sunshades.

When classified according to capability, more than half of them operate on a small scale, generating less than \$1 million each year. At larger enterprises, revenue reaches \$20 million.

Zhejiang province hosts 70 percent of the supplier base. Tiantai in Taizhou is the center of production, with approximately 200 factories clustered there. The hub's manufacturing history spans more than three decades.

Most companies, in fact, have accumulated years of R&D experience and can thereby offer low- to high-end models for cars, compact SUVs, pickups and buses. Local advantages include a network of material-processing specialists and a solid transport infrastructure.

This article "Car Cushion: Aesthetic upgrades stimulate buyer interest" is originally posted in Global Sources.

Contact suppliers in this article

Easepal Enterprises Ltd

Fujian Bai Xiang Car Decoration Co.,Ltd

Shenzhen A.T.R Industry Co., Ltd.

Zhejiang Tiantai Jianhua Craft Co., Ltd.

Zhejiang ZEC Group Auto Dept.

Xi'an Haitu Trading Co. Ltd

Note: All price quotes in this report are in US dollars unless otherwise specified. FOB prices were provided by the companies interviewed only as reference prices at the time of interview and may have changed.

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var prodsrch = prod;
var newURL =
"http://www.globalsources.com/gsol/GeneralManager?point_search=on&page=search%2FProductSearchResults&product_search=on&supplier_search=off&article_search=off&type=new&select_category=2000000003844&search_what=1&query="+prodsrch+"&point_id=3000000149681&catalog_id=2000000003844&from=&loc=t&action=GetPoint&action=DoFreeTextSearch&AFF=ImportingStories";
var finalURL = newURL;
if (prodsrch == "" || prodsrch == "Find China suppliers and products here...")
{ alert("Please enter keyword"); document.singleSearchbox3.query.focus(); }
else
{ window.location = finalURL; }
}
function write_blank() {document.singleSearchbox3.query.value="";}
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