

BUSINESS By George Thomson

## The car's the star

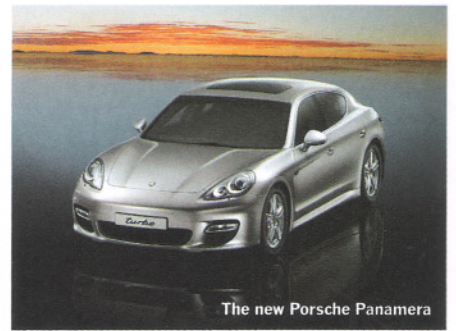
Porsche lead the charge at this year's Auto Shanghai expo

Auto exhibitions have long been curious affairs, accompanied by videos of laughing children and hollow phrases like 'Tomorrow's Solutions, Today' while green concept cars designed to run on granola bars and orange peel sit unloved in the corner. Elsewhere, hordes of wide-eyed petrolheads look on longingly as bikini-clad models drape themselves over the latest USD\$100,000 steel monster that promises to do 2.6 miles per gallon of Iraqi blood.

For an industry seemingly in terminal decline, unresponsive to increasing environmental awareness among consumers and rising energy costs, it's a blinkered approach. But if anywhere can continue to get away with pursuing the romantic side of motoring, it's China. Over the last twenty years, the middle kingdom has seen a phenomenal boom in auto sales, with Scotia Capital predicting it will be the only major nation to buck the global trend in 2009 and actually see sales grow.

In such a prosperous environment, it's no surprise the biennial Auto Shanghai has emerged as one of the most important global trade shows in the industry. This year's event, themed on 'Art of Innovation' (did we mention hollow phrases?), sees the global launch of Porsche's new Panamera, a four-door luxury sedan and the German manufacturer's first original model since 2005. As Porsche China's MD Helmut Broeker explains: "The Panamera's world debut at Auto Shanghai underlines Porsche's commitment to the China market." For one of Europe's most venerable luxury brands, it's a strong statement, and one that points to an increasing emphasis on the Chinese market in coming years.

Indeed, while many manufacturers have been frantically reducing their commitments to auto expos around the world in 2009 – as much to look carbon footprint cuddly as to cut costs – the



The new Porsche Panamera

### This year's event sees the global launch of Porsche's new Panamera

roster for Auto Shanghai 2009 reads like a who's who of modern motoring. With a whopping 170,000sqm of exhibition space and displays from everyone from Lamborghini to locals like Dongfeng, April promises to be a busy month for Shanghai's car enthusiasts. // Auto Shanghai takes part at the Shanghai New International Expo Center, Pudong, from 24-28 April. Tickets RMB50. For more details visit [www.autoshanghai.org/en](http://www.autoshanghai.org/en)

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