

Maruti eyes bigger mid-SUV play with Vitara

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New Delhi, August 30

WITH THE NEW Grand Vitara already bagging more than 45,000 bookings, Maruti Suzuki India is looking to enhance its presence in the mid-SUV segment, which is currently dominated by Hyundai Motor India's immensely successful Creta.

Maruti opened bookings for Grand Vitara on July 11, nine days before unveiling it on July 20. The company is expected to reveal the prices in September.

In FY22, the mid-SUV segment recorded volumes of over 560,000 units with a share of almost 18% in the overall passenger vehicle (PV) market. Maruti's share in the mid-SUV segment was only about 4%.

"In the entry-SUV segment, with our Brezza, we were achieving good volumes. However, the volumes from the mid-SUV segment were a concern as out of nearly 20 models in it, we had only one, S-Cross, and it was not able to gel with the actual consumer requirements," Maruti's senior executive officer for marketing and sales Shashank Srivastava told *EE*.

Having launched S-Cross in CY15, the company recently discontinued the model. It clocked volumes of merely 1,65,000 units, at an average of 2,000 units per month.

Creta is also sitting on 45,000 pending bookings, and industry experts said the



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brand pull of the vehicle is so strong that it would be difficult for any mid-SUV to overtake it in terms of volumes. The mid-SUV segment leader also entered the market in CY15. Hyundai has sold more than 762,000 units of Creta till now, with a monthly average of 9,000 units. Besides, the carmaker has exported over 259,000 units.

In the January-July period of CY22, Creta has been the largest-selling mid-SUV and second-largest-selling SUV in India at 80,046 units. Only Tata Motors' sub-four metre SUV, Nexon, is ahead at 96,984 units. However, Creta was the largest-selling SUV in the previous two years—CY21 at 125,437 units and CY20 at 96,989 units.

Hyundai claimed that over 51% of Creta buyers opt for the higher-spec trims, while diesel variants have a share of more than

60% in total sales. The vehicle offers numerous features (including those on the dashboard) and powertrain options to attract buyers from all age groups and geographies.

"Presently, the mid-SUV segment is the most competitive segment with competition increasing as more original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) are entering the fray," a Hyundai spokesperson said, adding that "our technology, product innovation and design have helped us maintain the pole position in India's SUV segment."

Apart from Creta, Grand Vitara will face stiff competition from Kia India's Seltos as well. Among the other contenders in the mid-SUV segment are Skoda Kushaq, Volkswagen Taigun and MG Astor.

Maruti's Srivastava said there is no doubt that some of the models present in the mid-

SUV segment have been doing quite well. According to him, Grand Vitara's hybrid system, better fuel efficiency (27.97 kmpl), all-wheel-drive system and bigger size will work in its favour.

He further said the company's wide sales and service network will come into play. Grand Vitara will be sold from Maruti's Nexa retail channel, which has completed seven years in India and now boasts of as many as 420 showrooms across the country, having a customer base of over 1.7 million. The hatchbacks like Ignis and Baleno, Ciaz mid-size sedan and XL6 MPV are also sold from Nexa showrooms. "The booking figures (over 45,000) for Grand Vitara show that we are giving all that consumers want in this segment and currently not provided by other models," Srivastava said.

At present, XL6 is the most expensive vehicle in Maruti's portfolio with its top-spec trim priced at ₹14.39 lakh (ex-showroom). Experts believe that Grand Vitara will be more expensive than XL6, given its powertrain options and features.

"Because we sell a large number of small cars, there is a sense among people that we can only sell small cars. Whenever people have said that Maruti can't compete in a segment, we have been very successful. The only segment where we have not been successful is mid-SUV," he said. "We are confident that we will lead the SUV segment too."