

GM says Sept China auto sales up 1.7 percent on year

Reuters – General Motors Co's (GM.N) auto sales in China climbed only 1.7 percent in September, barely benefiting from its Japanese rivals' plunging sales, in contrast to European and South Korean carmakers.

Deliveries of GM's 'Wuling' micro vans, a brand which accounts for nearly half of GM's China sales, came to 119,510, up a marginal 0.4 percent from a year earlier as a weak Chinese economy hurt small business owners, the Wuling's key buyers.

Sales at GM's car venture with SAIC Motor Corp (600104.SS) edged up 3.7 percent, compared with a 17.4 increase in September 2011.

GM appears to have missed an opportunity to step into the gap left by Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T), Honda Motor Co (7267.T) and Nissan Motor Co (7201.T), whose sales have fallen as a result of an outbreak of anti-Japanese sentiment in China, analysts said.

"German and Korean players are the biggest beneficiaries from the woes of the Japanese as they are much more competitive in the SUV segment," said John Zeng, Asia Pacific director for industry consultancy LMC Automotive.

Sales of Japanese cars in China have dropped since protests erupted across the country in mid-September over the Japanese government's purchase of a group of disputed islands in the East China Sea.

Toyota's China sales fell 40 percent in September from a year earlier, and sales at Mazda Motor Corp (7261.T) were down 35 percent.

BMW (BMWG.DE), however, boosted its China sales by 55 percent in the month, Audi by 20 percent and Mercedes-Benz by 10 percent.

For the first nine months of 2012, GM's sales in China were up 10 percent to 2.08 million vehicles.

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