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Made-in-India Suzuki Baleno launch in Japan – A Turning Point

Maruti Suzuki India launched its first "Made In India" car, the Baleno, in the Japanese market on March 9, 2016, giving a huge boost to India's flagship 'Make In India' programme. The car was launched in Tokyo by Osamu Suzuki, Chairman & CEO of Suzuki Motor Corporation, Toshihiro Suzuki, President & COO of Suzuki Motor Corporation and Sujan R. Chinoy, Ambassador of India to Japan.

This is the first time ever that a Japanese company made a product in India and launched it at its Head office, where the prime technology premises are based. It also plans to export to home country, Japan and over 100 other countries .
The K- Factor: Baleno is launched in Japan as Kei car, K-car, or kei jidōsha also referred as a "light automobile". It is a Japanese category of small vehicles, referring to passenger cars. The category is very popular among Japanese family buyers and is designed to comply with Japanese government's tax and insurance regulations, and in most rural areas are exempt from the requirement to certify that adequate parking is available for the vehicle. The K-car category is popular in Japan also for its sleek designs and is preferred as cost-effective vehicles. Also in Japan, the K-car body can be selected based on buyers' preference. The K-car was started in 1950s in Japan by various manufacturers- while Suzuki is credited for pioneering the segment. Out of many luxury car segments the K-car category has evolved to overcome the adversity in Japan and remains as a preferred model .

In Japan, from the light car segment, last year there was significant. Suzuki new mini-car "Hustler" was chosen Car of the Year Award. Suzuki seems to bring back its charm by adding another model made in/from India – the Baleno.

No wonder, Osamu Suzuki is called as Mr Light Car Man of Japan, as he pioneered the small car segment. During the 1970s and 1980s K-car segment faced huge challenges or crisis in Japan. The crisis also enabled Suzuki to set up its first overseas plant in India.

It was truly overwhelming to see a preferred car segment which was facing huge challenges in Japan forcing the company to set up a plant outside Japan and after 3 decades the same segment car produced overseas is being launched in Japan and ready to take off in the Japanese roads.

In the Launch ceremony, Kenichi Ayukawa, MD & CEO, Maruti Suzuki India said, "A landmark moment like this is a true testimony to the success of Indian Government's "Make in India" campaign. Launch of 'Made in India' Baleno in Japan is a proud moment for all of us. This reaffirms Maruti Suzuki's manufacturing potential and growing importance of Maruti Suzuki India in Suzuki Motor Corporation's global business strategies. I am confident our Baleno will be well accepted by Japanese customers as well." The launch event also had gathered wide media attention in Japan.

This refreshing move is expected to encourage other Japanese manufacturers who are spread out across regions and countries
and evaluating strategies to effectively work out Made in India products for Japan and other markets. As the K factor is attractive even in Japanese market, we can hope India made K-car category will soon pick up among Japanese consumers. Some analysts started calling this move as a turning point which will significantly enhance India-Japan economic relations.

Writer Profile: Junko Nirmala is a Tokyo resident with 17 years of experience in technology and business consulting services mainly focusing on India-Japan Market and cross border related services. Her diverse background even includes a short stint as a Venturepreuner. During the last few years she has helped several Japanese companies with their India market entry strategies.Writer can be reached at junkonirmala@gmail.com