

ADVERTISING

Will marketing to a wider audience dilute Bentley?

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By RACHEL LAMB

Even though Volkswagen's Bentley may be trying to target a wider audience with the introduction of the EXP 9 F concept car, a Bentley-appropriate price tag along with brand cache may allow the prestigious automaker to avoid brand dilution and keep its luxury status.

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The Bentley EXP 9 F concept car is a sports utility vehicle, a car model that is typically used by families and off-road use and has been pushed aggressively in the market by Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Lexus and even Porsche. What will separate the EXP 9 F from other SUVs is the way that Bentley transfers its values and persona into the new vehicle, rather than trying to mimick like models.

“I believe that Bentley is trying to attract a wider audience, and by definition it is a downward move,” said Milton Pedraza, CEO of the Luxury Institute, New York. “There will be some dilution, but sometimes a less-exclusive factor is OK because it allows you to broaden your appeal and bring in double or maybe triple the revenue.

“I think that when Porsche crossed the line into the SUV territory, it became OK for other very high-end brands,” he said. “I think that the concept will help the brand become sportier, but it has to be a very resilient product and come through on its promises.

Mr. Pedraza is not affiliated with Bentley, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. Bentley did not respond before press deadline.

Experience Bentley

The Bentley EXP 9 F is a “bold reinterpretation of Bentley design cues in a spacious, versatile and high-performance SUV,” according to the brand. It was first introduced at the Geneva Motor Show earlier this week as a potential third Bentley model line.

The concept car is a 6-liter, twin turbocharged W12 engine and eight-speed transmission.

The EXP 9 F is a fusion of contemporary, crafted luxury, advanced in-car technology, commanding driving position and all-terrain capability, according to Bentley.



Bentley EXP 9 F

Although the price for this vehicle, should it go into production, is unknown, various sources speculate a high-six-figure price tag.

“I believe that the EXP 9 F will absolutely add value to Bentley,” said Chris Olshan, chief marketing officer of the Luxury Marketing Council, New York.

“Bentley is one of the most luxurious auto brands in the world and adding a luxury SUV to the portfolio will expand the brand to people who are new to the brand while tapping into a new market of soccer moms and families,” he said.

League of its own

Bentley is likely not in competition with other SUV manufacturers including Land Rover, BMW and Mercedes, since the former’s price tag is generally higher, according to Mr. Pedraza.

However, that does not mean that other luxury automakers are not trying to target younger, affluent females.



Bentley EXP 9 F

In fact, Mercedes-Benz USA CEO Steve Cannon said last year that the bulk of 2011 models were aimed toward younger women ([see story](#)).

“It could drop them down a bit, but it’s not like they are going into mainstream prices,” Luxury Institute’s Mr. Pedraza said.

However, Bentley does need to ensure that it stays true to the brand values and voice, keeping in mind that its cache is what most separates the EXP 9 F from other luxury SUVs.

“I don’t think that it’ll change the brand image, because one of the many great things about Bentley is that when it does something, it always does it right,” Luxury Marketing Council’s Mr. Olshan said.

“I’m sure that [the EXP 9 F] will be on-par with the other vehicles and stay at the pinnacle of luxury,” he said.

Final Take

Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York