

**LOOKING  TO SUCCEED**

  
**IN THE  
 UK?**

**juice.**

# BUILD A BRAND

Chinese car makers looking for proof the UK is a highly receptive market need look no further than sales figures for March 2026.

In what is always the peak month each year, an SUV from a brand few had heard of a year or two before became the country's top selling model. The Jaecoo 7 won top spot, beating heavy competition from the established favourites of the Ford Puma and Nissan Qashqai.

# NOT A PRICE POINT

From a standing start just a couple of years ago, Chinese car makers now account for 10% of the UK new car sales, a doubling of market share between 2024 and 2025. Success in EVs is proving even higher, accounting for 30% of new registrations. To put that fast growth into perspective, Chinese car makers now have double the market share in the UK than across the EU.

10%

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EVs → 30%

Success in EVs is proving even higher, accounting for 30% of new registrations.

## WANT TO SUCCEED IN THE UK? BUILD A BRAND NOT A PRICE POINT

continued

The UK stands out among these neighbours. It's a lucrative market, the second biggest in Europe for volume, with just over 2m new cars sold each year.

Unlike the EU, though, the UK has not watered down its mandatory switch to electric vehicles. New petrol and diesel car sales remain banned from 2030 and hybrids from 2035. This puts the emphasis for future sales on battery powered EVs and the high performance, affordable technology Chinese car companies are renowned for.

Unlike the EU, the UK has not blocked the road ahead with high, protectionist tariffs. A 10% import duty remains but this is dwarfed by the EU's import duty and tariffs which reach a combined 45% for imported Chinese battery electric vehicles (BEVs).

What's more, British consumers are international in their outlook. A recent survey reported on by Motoring Research found 7 in 10 British car buyers are open to buying from a previously unknown Chinese brand.

This early success provides grounds for optimism but there is a warning for any Chinese car maker who thinks all they have to do is arrive and expect guaranteed success. The door is now wide open and the British public has proven very welcoming. The question now is not whether Chinese cars will sell but rather which brands will still be successful in five years' time when the initial rush of excitement is over?

It's one thing to sell a car, quite another to build a brand people love and feel loyalty towards. There is no doubt UK consumers will buy Chinese cars, therefore the onus is now on companies to build brands which UK consumers trust enough to drive repeat business and ensure longevity in the market.

45%

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7 in 10

British car buyers are open to buying from a previously unknown Chinese brand

The gurus at the highly respected marketing website, The Drum, recently summed up the issue succinctly. When discussing the branding challenge Chinese car makers must now address after early success in the UK, with BYD most in mind, it's Editor reminded:

“PEOPLE DON'T JUST BUY  
CARS, **THEY BUY BRANDS,** THE  
**HISTORY** AND THE **MEANING**  
BEHIND THOSE BADGES.”

# BRANDS STAND OUT, PRICE TAGS JUST BLEND IN

Chinese car brands have truly shaken up the UK market with highly competitive pricing, eye-catching design, a good range of technology as standard and generous after sales packages, all supported by fast roll-outs of dealership networks

The BBC recently suggested the projected 10% share of new car registrations for 2025

may have already reached 15% after just the first quarter of 2026.

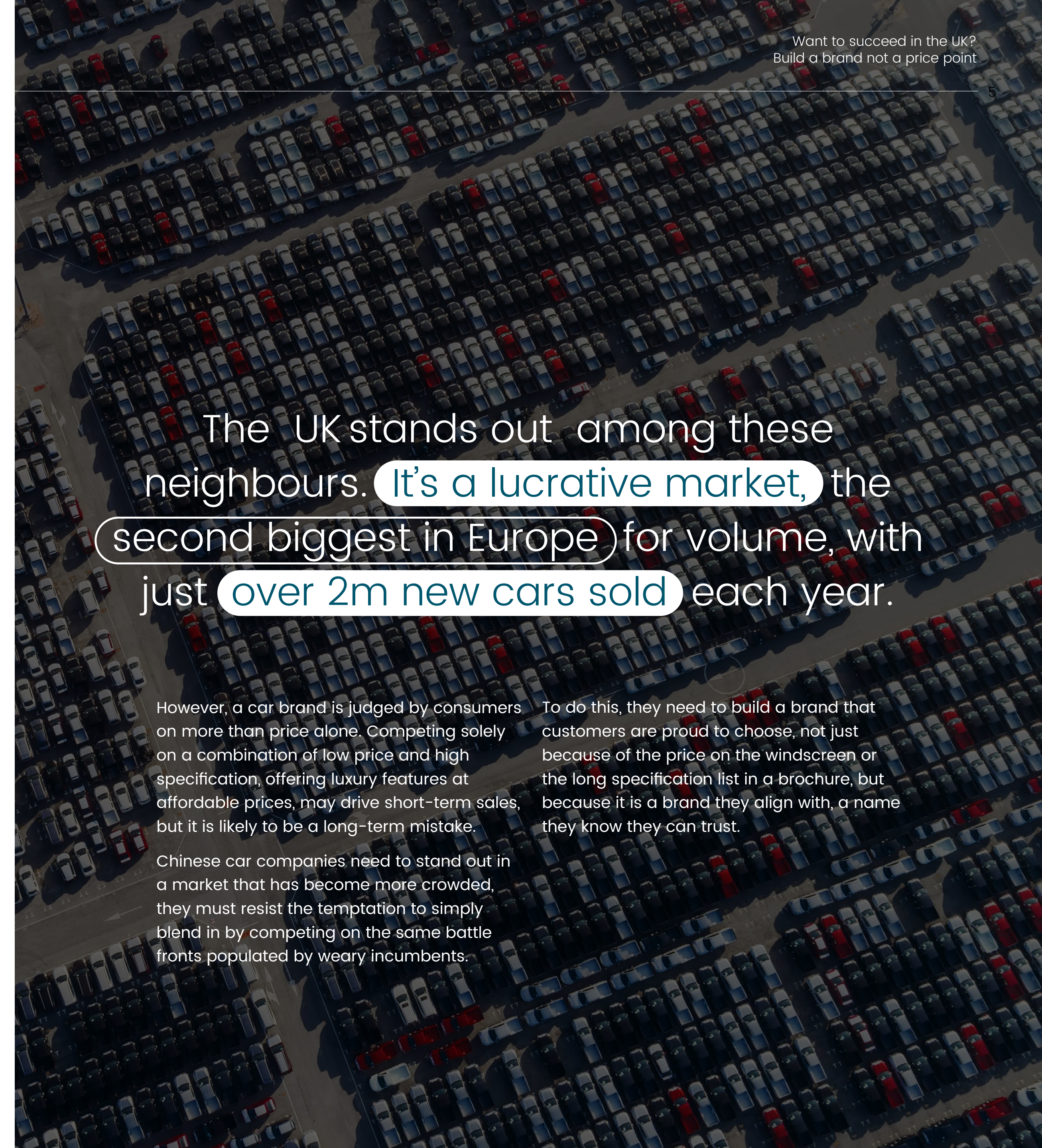
The UK is well positioned, it concludes, to enjoy being a central part of the rise of the world's biggest car exporter through the wide availability of highly affordable technologically advanced cars that will one day soon, it predicts, be charged to full in as little time as it takes to boil a kettle.

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However, a car brand is judged by consumers on more than price alone. Competing solely on a combination of low price and high specification, offering luxury features at affordable prices, may drive short-term sales, but it is likely to be a long-term mistake.

Chinese car companies need to stand out in a market that has become more crowded, they must resist the temptation to simply blend in by competing on the same battle fronts populated by weary incumbents.

To do this, they need to build a brand that customers are proud to choose, not just because of the price on the windscreen or the long specification list in a brochure, but because it is a brand they align with, a name they know they can trust.



# THE HUGE TRUST AND LOYALTY OPPORTUNITY

The one thing to know about the UK car market is that brand loyalty is declining. Traditionally, owners would have a favoured brand they would stick with, rather like staying with the same bank for life.

However, AutoTrader's research has proven what many suspect – brand loyalty can no longer be relied on by existing car makers. Less than half (just 44%) of British customers now choose a new petrol car from their previous brand and the decline is even more noticeable in EVs. With the launch of entirely new ranges from existing brands and newcomers to choose from, only 22% have bought a new EV from their previous supplier.

There are multiple reasons why. UK consumers have had their faith in the traditional giants in the market shaken by the 2015 'dieseltgate' scandal in which some cars were able to trick testing systems into underreporting their emissions. Duped customers were furious, leading to legal claims from 1.6m owners. There has also been a furore over 12m car finance packages being mis-sold between 2007 and 2024 leaving car manufacturers facing a £7.5bn compensation bill.

There has also been a wider erosion of trust among consumers in the UK who are now almost at the bottom of the well-respected global Trust Barometer, produced by Edelman each year. In contrast, consumers in China are in top spot.

There are two takeouts. Trust and loyalty cannot be taken for granted, they must be earned in the UK. At the same time, though, there has never been a better time for Chinese manufacturers to enter the market and take advantage of declining trust and loyalty in incumbent car makers.

With nearly four in five electric car buyers not favouring their previous brand, the door is wide open to new entrants.

44%

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£7.5bn

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# WHAT DOES GREAT BRANDING LOOK LIKE?

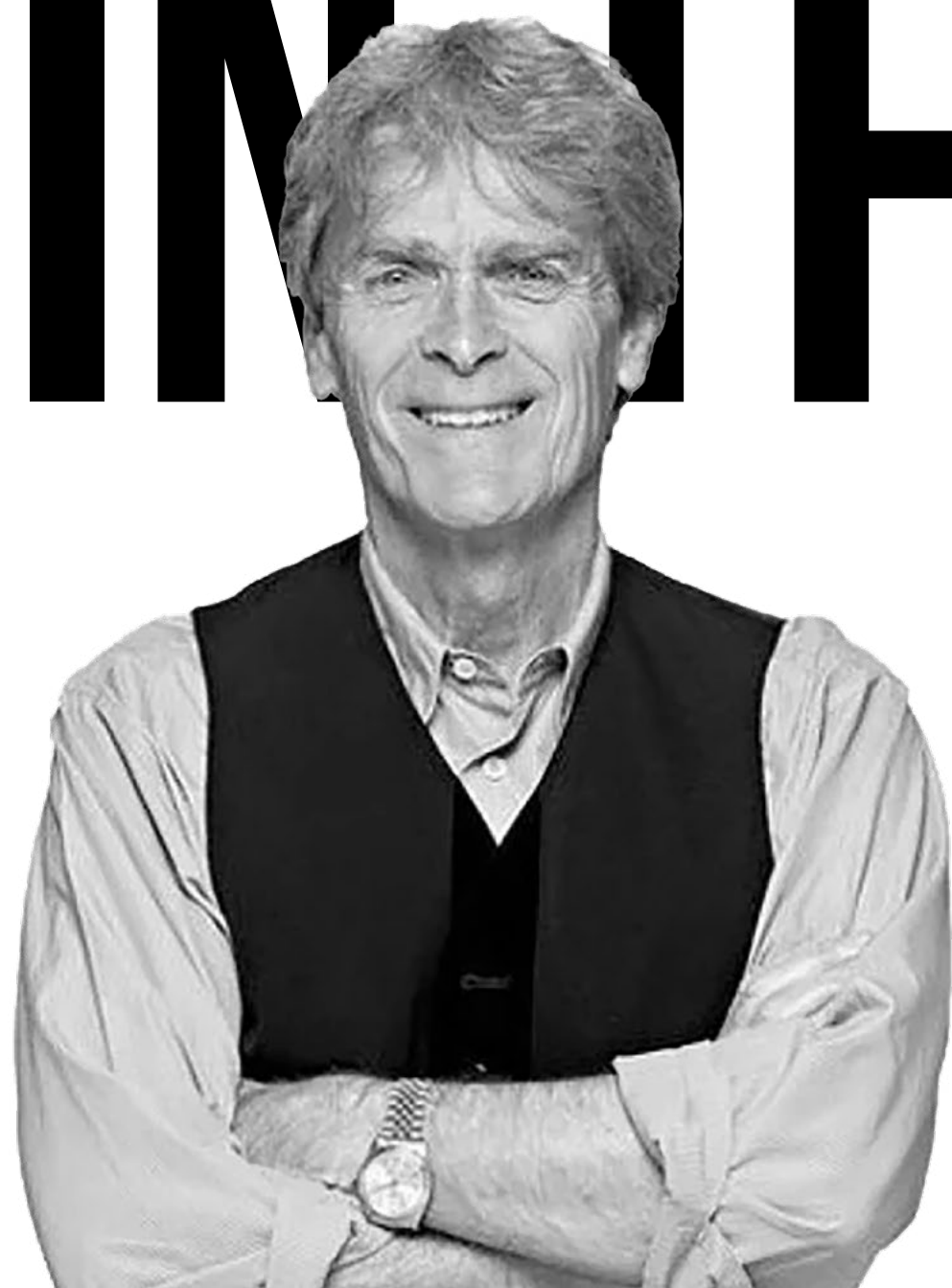
The bigger opportunity is to focus on standing for a deeper brand meaning that people want to buy into, which they know they can rely on.

This need to actively build a brand that engenders trust, rather than expect competitive pricing to win fans, can be seen in Jaecoo's brand platform. It's 'Brands aren't bought, They're Earned' campaign tagline sums up how makers need to engage consumers hearts and minds, not just their wallets or technological curiosity.

So how should this branding challenge be approached? When Mintel surveyed the UK market, it found consumers, above all else, want exceptional customer experiences. More than half the overall UK market, 59%, name service as the biggest influence when they choose a brand and dealership to buy their new car. This rises to 72% for those aged 55 and over.



# WHAT MAKES A BRAND WIN IN THE UK



“BRANDS ARE BUILT  
ON WHAT THEY  
MEAN, NOT WHAT  
THEY MAKE.”

Sir John Hegarty

The brands that will succeed in the UK by building customer trust won't be those with the longest spec sheet or the lowest price. They will be the ones that stand for something clear – and feel different.

As Sir John Hegarty, founder of the BBH advertising agency, puts it in *The Business of Creativity*, “brands are built on what they mean, not what they make.” Function gets you considered. Meaning gets you chosen.

This is where many new entrants go wrong. They focus on proving value, when they should be building value. They optimise for rational comparison, when real decisions are driven by emotion, memory and instinct.

Marketing research business, System1, is unequivocal on this. The most effective brands are not the most informative, they are the most distinctive and emotionally fluent.

They create what System1 calls  
*“fame, feeling and fluency”*:

## FAME

Being mentally available at the moment of choice

## FEELING

Creating positive emotional response

## FLUENCY

Being instantly recognisable and easy to process

**This is how brands grow. Not by high sales in the short-term, but by being remembered, preferred and chosen again in the future.**

In a market where trust has been eroded and loyalty is up for grabs, this matters even more. British consumers are not just choosing a car. They are choosing a signal of taste, judgement and identity.

That's the real opportunity for Chinese car makers. Not to be the smarter choice. Not to be the better value choice. But to be the brand people feel good about choosing and are proud to be seen in.

BECAUSE IN THE END PRICE GETS YOU INTO THE MARKET. MEANING IS WHAT KEEPS YOU THERE

# JUICE.

Juice is a UK-based creative agency working with global brands to enter, scale and succeed in the UK market through brand strategy, content and digital.

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[hello@itsjuice.com](mailto:hello@itsjuice.com)  
[www.itsjuice.com](http://www.itsjuice.com)