

Automarket gains speed

Customs duties on cars are to rise from July 1st, as Customs Union fees come into force, shaking the domestic market for second-hand vehicles

Prices have grown by around \$1,000 in just a few days, with western suppliers of second-hand vehicles reacting promptly. Cars have grown in price by \$500-1,500 on the markets of Lithuania and Germany, with demand remaining overwhelming. Never before have we witnessed so many cars on our roads bearing transit plate-numbers. Even those with no previous plans to sell or buy a car are considering the idea.

It's no surprise, since 90 per cent of all cars driven in Belarus are bought on the second-hand market, with most arriving from western countries. From July 1st, imports of such vehicles will significantly drop in volume, as the customs duties on the average car will exceed its price. There are two ways of avoiding the price hike: buy a second-hand car from within the Customs Union; or buy a new vehicle, assembled or produced in Belarus, Russia or Kazakhstan.

Over the past five years, production (primarily assembly) of foreign cars has risen 8-fold in Russia. Last year, the manufacture of foreign branded cars even exceeded the production of

domestic vehicles, for the first time in our history. About fifteen assembly facilities of the largest global companies operate in the country and, soon, Belarusians will have to rely on them. Russia offers a wide choice of its own foreign cars, manufacturing most models which enjoy popularity in Belarus. Domestic buyers tend to be suspicious of deluxe models, preferring to buy more common vehicles, for which it's easier to buy spare parts.

Experts believe that the future levelling of customs fees across the Customs Union opens up good prospects for Belarus' own assembly facilities. The Chairman of the Belarusian Automobile Association, Sergey Mikhnevich, is keen to create conditions to attract the largest global producers, encouraging them to open factories here. He asserts that we should forge ties to ensure we do not remain an outsider. "Car assembly could bring significant benefits where cars are produced in dozens of thousands annually," he says, adding, "The capacity of the Customs Union makes it possible to launch such facilities in Belarus. The model range



Most Belarusian car owners prefer time-tested models

needs to be constantly updated, with factories able to respond promptly to changing technology and trends. Belarus boasts highly qualified specialists, in addition to machine building enterprises, which can help set up the production of spare parts. We should start by manufacturing components, with car assembly following at a later date. It's no easy task, although we have successful experience in manufacturing tractors and trucks." So far, only Iran's Samand cars are assembled in Belarus but a joint Belarusian-

Chinese venture is being considered, with talks underway.

Experts say that prices will continue growing on the secondary market for several months, with second-hand foreign car prices only stabilising when they equate to those of Russia. Cars are now being exported to Russia. Where 'younger' cars have traditionally been of greater value, those which are suitable for sale to Russia are most in demand. From July 1st, our secondary car market will really only exist within Customs Union ter-

ritory. Not everyone is ready to pay \$12,000-15,000 for a simple, economy class car. After July 1st, those who have avoided falling prey to the current rush, will still have the opportunity to sell their cars.

Most Belarusian car dealers are to begin importing foreign cars assembled in Russia later this year, allowing us to buy a famous brand vehicle while avoiding huge customs duties. Sellers will be able to revive the market for new cars, which has been in crisis for several years now.

Diagnosis by light wave

By Alexander Denisenko

Light possesses the unique ability to reflect from any media, becoming a carrier of information. The National Academy of Sciences' Physics Institute is using this characteristic to develop a unique medical diagnostic device, used to learn how dangerous diseases are carried in the blood. Moreover, there is no need for personal contact with patients.

At the Institute's Optics and Dispersive Media Laboratory, I was shown the whole process. "Please, bring your finger closer," requests Vladimir Barun, a senior research officer. I sit at a table with a mysterious black chamber filled with optical conductors, radiating light. After receiving firm guarantees that nothing will happen to my finger, I place it carefully and the computer draws a spectrum across the monitor.

Light from a standard halogen lamp is reflected from my skin, sending data to the spectrophotometer about my blood's oxygen content, the state of the



Scientific employees test the spectrophotometric device

capillaries in my subdermis and much more. It takes only a few minutes for the physicists to decode the spectrum of the reflected signal. Once the spectrophotometer becomes automated by software, the computer will give exact blood characteristics to doctors, allowing diagnosis within split seconds.

In fact, the device also registers physical characteristics of the skin, which are sometimes difficult for even experienced dermatologists to see. It can pick up age-related skin changes, as well as diseases, and can monitor the effects of various medications and cosmetic preparations. In

fact, this allows them to be assessed, protecting domestic customers from dishonest manufacturers, who may make exaggerated claims about the benefits of their skin care products, or even sell potentially dangerous preparations.

"The project is part of the state sci-tech programme," explains Arkady Ivanov, doctor of physico-mathematical sciences. "Using the results of clinical practice, the spectrophotometer will be improved, taking into account doctors' wishes. We can then manufacture it en masse. Initially, a small batch can be produced by our institute or by a small innovation enterprise."

Following the example of foreign countries

By Olga Primakova

Guards to patrol border on horseback

Initially, horseback mounted patrols will be conducted on a trial basis, with two checkpoints involved at the first stage: four horses servicing each. Animals bred in Belarus will be preferred, being used to our climate; stables are now being equipped, with military riders chosen. "Well trained, armed and equipped horse squadrons are successfully deployed by

the police and border guards in other countries, such as Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania and Russia," stresses the Head of Belarus' State Border Committee Press Service, Alexander Tishchenko. "Having studied the experience of our close neighbours, we've decided to revive the tradition in our country this year. Moreover, we have some parts of the border where horse patrols have better access than cars — primarily park and tourist zones, which boast historical and ecological

treasures." Accordingly, the Grodno and Polotsk border squadrons have been chosen, as their regions are known for their reserves and picturesque landscapes, including the Augustovskiy Canal and Lake Osveiskoe.

The decision on whether such horse patrols would become widely used will be made after the trial ends in two years' time. Several factors will be taken into consideration: how horses perform, economic profitability and convenience.

History brought to life

By Yelena Safronova

Archaeological museum-laboratory opens at Gomel State University

The museum has two halls, exhibiting numerous artefacts gathered by the History Department's teachers and students during archaeological internships and scientific expeditions. These fully reflect the history of the Gomel Region: from the



Exhibits at new museum

Palaeolithic Age to modern times. This south-eastern region of the country is unique in that the most ancient Belarusian settlements from

the Stone Age have been found there: near the village of Berdyzh, in the Chechersk District, and in Yurovichi, in the Kalinkovichi District.

The museum is also home to stone axes from the Bronze Age, medieval amulets from bone and metal and antique ceramics. Its displays should help educate schoolchildren keen to learn about the history of their native region.