

# Italian DNA, Chinese scale: Benelli enters India's superbike market

**fe Bureau**

**Pune, Oct 17:** The Indian superbike market is becoming irresistible with bikes in the 250cc and above segment growing at 25% and sales expected to touch 18,000 units annually by 2020 from around 6,000 currently.

Now, Benelli, an Italian heritage bike with new Chinese ownership, has entered the market. It has signed a technical partnership with DSK Motowheels, part of the Pune-based DSK Group, to bring the superbikes to India. But, unlike other brands, Benelli is keen on entering every segment of the motorcycle market — from 125cc to 1,600 cc.

The company will launch five bikes — 300cc, 600cc, 898cc, 1131cc and TNT 1130R — in India in two months.

Frank Zhuang, board director of Benelli QJSRL, said that given the Indian market's size and growth, the country will play a big role in its global expansion plans, especially Asia. India will become one of the biggest markets for Benelli in terms of sales, Zhuang said.

The company will start out small and gradually scale up and, in future, consider local manufacturing and even exports, Zhuang said. As of now, it will be a technology partnership, with DSK assembling the bikes in India.

"We will do what we are best at — which is design, R&D and manufacturing. We are here for the long term and to be a major player in the market, he said.

Benelli will also be the first superbike maker to enter the com-

muter segment. "If we want to stay long in this market, we will have to play an important role in this segment," Zhuang said.

Benelli, which also has scooters in its portfolio, is a 103-year

old Italian brand. It is now owned by Qian Jiang Group, among the largest motorcycle makers in China. The superbike segment — 250 cc onwards — now has a dozen companies vying for the atten-

tion of biking enthusiasts. There is Suzuki, Kawasaki, Yamaha, Harley-Davidson, Honda, Ducati, KTM, Aprilia, Hyosung, BMW and Triumph. Though Benelli is late entrant, Shirish Kulkarni, chairman of DSK Motowheels, says the only real competition for him is the Harley and Triumph.

The 1,130 and 899 range of Benelli will be sourced from Italy and the 300, 600 and FT 600 from the plant in China, Kulkarni said.

The company will start its India operations with assembly of CKD kits at the DSK Motowheels plant in Wai, near Satara, which currently make 250 bikes a month. It can go up to 500 bikes in two shifts, Kulkarni said.

DSK Motowheel has been present in India's superbike space

for the last two years through South Korea's Hyosung. The company sold 1,800 Hyosung bikes last year and expects to sell around 2,400 this year through 40 dealers. For Benelli, DSK Motowheels will set up an independent dealership and service network across the country, Kulkarni said. He said there will be around 20 dealers in 6-8 months.

Benelli, which has a limited presence in the commuter segment, is keen on entering the space in India. It is in the process of developing commuter bikes for emerging markets, and is making new engines in the 200, 300, 400, 500, 750 and 1,600 cc range.

Benelli sells 30,000 units globally, but aims to take this number to 300,000-5,00,000.



## GEARING UP

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