

MOTORING



NO LEAP OF FAITH

Guilherme Marques

TEST DRIVE || Leapmotor have arrived with two cars that suit the Portuguese landscape of pure electric vehicles. And with the Stellantis quality seal.

THERE is no escaping the fact the Chinese are years ahead of the European auto industry when it comes to electric cars. The Chinese used their crystal ball to look into the future and saw governments around the world wanting to look super eco-conscious by imposing the end of the combustion engine – and they started investing heavily in batteries and electric motors.

Now, in 2025, it seems there is a new Chinese electric constructor every other week and some of them are making their way into the Old Continent. The problem (okay, one of the problems) is trying to figure out which ones are credible, and which are not. In other words, which ones will be here in a decade and which ones will be consigned to the history books. Or not even that.

That brings us to Leapmotor, the new kid on the block. A kid born in 2015 but with a major trick up its sleeve: it comes to Europe as part of a joint venture with the Stellantis group. That means that, basically, it will sit on Stellantis' portfolio of brands next to Peugeot, Citroën, Opel, Fiat or Jeep, among all others.

In October 2023, Stellantis N.V. and Leapmotor announced a €1.5 billion

investment from the European group in order to acquire approximately 20% of the Chinese manufacturer, giving birth to Leapmotor International, a 51/49 Stellantis-led joint venture with exclusive rights for the manufacturing, export and sale of Leapmotor products outside Greater China.

With this move, Stellantis wanted to leverage Leapmotor's highly innovative, cost-efficient EV ecosystem in China to reach its own electrification targets, while expanding its own global commercial presence and bring more affordable mobility solutions to customers worldwide.

This was, obviously, Leapmotor's ticket to credibility in the European market, something that, in a normal process of establishing the brand, would take at least a decade. Fast-forward to 2025 and Leapmotor have arrived in Portugal with two offerings to begin with: the small T03 and the C10 SUV. I drove them both but will focus primarily on the T03, as it seems to be a more relevant car in the short term for Leapmotor, although electric SUVs are all the rage at the moment.

The T03 sits on a segment mainstream manufacturers have abandoned, as profit margins were too small. The



Leapmotor C10



money was in SUVs. Leapmotor International CEO Tian-shu Xin begs to differ though. He believes demand is there for simple, smaller, cheaper cars, provided the manufacturing is cost-efficient – and that's where his brand is very good. The T03 is built at Stellantis' Tychy plant, in Poland, as to avoid any additional tariffs and it is then channelled to the group's dealer network.

After the Power Point presentation and a cup of coffee, I approached the T03 with an open mind. I had seen the pictures and caught a glimpse on the way in at the cars parked outside. I already knew the T03 was never going to win any beauty contests. Then again, that is not its raison d'être.

Size-wise, at 3.62m, it's 1 cm shorter than a Fiat 500e and almost 40 cm shorter than a Renault 5 e-Tech, Mini Cooper E or Peugeot e-208. But let's jump right to the

'Founded in 2015, Leapmotor is already the third biggest electric and plug-in hybrid vehicle maker in China. In 2024, it sold almost 300,000 cars worldwide. Big wow'

most important number: €19,600. That is how much the T03 costs, meaning it is the cheapest EV on sale.

Looking at the equipment on offer, it seems cheaper still. There is an eight-inch instrument display and 10.1in touchscreen, a multifunction steering wheel, parking sensors, a reversing camera and a very nice sunroof. All of that is standard and the only options available are for the body colour: blue, silver or white, and that's it.

The T03 is fitted with a 37.3kWh battery and Leapmotor says it will do up to 256km (or up to 395km if driven only in the city) before needing a recharge. On a single-phase AC charging home unit 6.6kW are available, whereas on a DC charger at service stations 48kW are possible. It makes 95 horsepower from a single motor driving the front wheels and takes 12.7 seconds to reach 100km/h, however irrelevant that may be in a car like this.

Behind the wheel, the T03 delivers on the promise of a simple, comfortable,

easy to use city runabout that is quite roomy inside and really rather practical. I wish there were less pings and pongs telling me to be aware of every little thing on the road (I have a driver's license Mr. T03), but, overall, the small Leapmotor is what I expected.

There are three different driving modes, but the personality of the car changes little between them. It's brisk rather than fast and it's not a car to take corners, let's say, in a sprightly manner, but the T03 never feels outpaced in normal traffic or anything other than a car of today.

Will it be a runaway success? I am as curious as anyone to find out how a sub-€20,000 car performs on the market in this day and age.

I don't want to end without mentioning the electric C10. It's a modern-looking mid-size SUV with a 69.9kWh battery offering 420 km of range. It is powered by a single motor producing 218 hp to the rear wheels. Yes, it's rear-wheel drive!

Tuned by Alfa Romeo engineers in Europe, the C10 is smooth and linear in its power delivery and corners with aplomb, mimicking with ease the feeling of a European car. The infotainment is really good and very responsive and all things digital work beautifully well. Prices start at €37,400 for the Style version, which is incredible value for money.

These guys are definitely here to stay.



Leapmotor T03

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