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Japanese Demand for Foreign Cars Grows as Choices Widen

TOKYO – Imports of foreign-made vehicles in Japan surged 67 percent in November, the Japan Automobile Importers Association said Tuesday.

A total of 26,121 passenger cars and trucks were sold last month, up from 15,636 in November 1993. Sales of foreign cars in Japan have been rising for many years as a result of lower prices, a greater choice of vehicles and wider acceptance among Japanese consumers. Of the total imports 24,930 passenger cars were sold in November, up 66 percent from a year earlier.

Takayuki Shimosaka, a spokesman for the association, said more Japanese dealers were selling a greater variety of imported vehicles. Honda Motor Co.'s dealer network, for instance distributes vehicles made by Chrysler Corp.

Mercedes-Benz AG led all importers in November, Honda was close behind. Sales of cars from Ford Motor Co., which led US auto companies, more than tripled from a year earlier, to 1,325 units.

Among all imported vehicles, 6,724 were Japanese-brand cars produced abroad, the association said.

Despite the increase, imports still made up only 6.1 percent of all new cars sold in Japan in November, as foreign car dealers said barriers to doing business in Japan continued to make progress.