

0 Striving Towards a Modern Coastal Metropolis

Bull Charges into Electric Mobility Sector with Innovation

By Jin Lu

Known for the slogan "10 out of 7 Chinese families use Bull" and its reputation as the "king of power strips", Ningbo's Bull Group is now venturing into the charging pile industry. On April 22, our correspondent visited Bull Group's production facility, where charging connectors and piles were being assembled and prepared for shipment.

"The surge in demand for electric vehicles has ushered in a golden age for the charging pile industry. New energy vehicles are our top strategic focus for future business expansion," said Xie Weiwei, Vice President and General Manager of Bull Group's New Energy Division.

Entering the Electric Mobility Market

In 2021, Bull Group made the strategic move to enter the new energy mobility sector, focusing on the production of charging connectors and piles. This is not the first time Bull has ventured beyond its original market. Founded in 1995, the company quickly dominated the power strip market in China within six years. Bull then expanded into wall switches and sockets in 2007, lighting in 2014, digital accessories in 2016, and safety circuit breakers, bath heaters, smart locks, and clothes dryers in 2018.

Over nearly 30 years, Bull has consistently embraced change. Despite entering the charging pile market just over three years ago—relatively late compared to some industry leaders—Bull has quickly made its mark. Leveraging its technical expertise, brand image, and extensive distribution channels, along with significant R&D investment, Bull has rapidly emerged as a rising star in the charging pile sector.

Currently, Bull is primarily focusing on the consumer market, offering a diverse product line. Their portable



Ningbo's Bull Group. [Photo by Yin Cong]

chargers and AC charging piles have become industry leaders, with global sales dominating the market. Achieving this was no easy feat.

"Manufacturing charging piles may seem similar to producing power strips, as both involve electrical circuitry, but there are significant differences," said Xie. Building a charging pile requires integrating digital platforms while creating a safe and stable electrical connection. It also involves the development of complex power modules, control modules, and software.

"To become an industry leader, innovation and R&D are crucial. We insist on autonomously developing and manufacturing all of our core components," Xie emphasized. This is the foundational principle behind Bull's significant investments in innovation and R&D.

Since entering the new energy mobility sector over three years ago, Bull has established R&D bases in Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Cixi. The company has developed core technologies in

charging and software, and has assembled a highly skilled technical team.

Developing Core Technologies

"Currently, more than one-third of our New Energy Division's personnel are R&D staff," Xie noted, underscoring Bull's commitment. In the factory, Xie showcased the power module of a DC charging pile, calling it the "heart" of the system. The technical team spent a year developing this core technology and establishing the manufacturing process, a challenging feat in the industry.

Technological innovation is crucial for developing new productive capacities. Over 20 years ago, Bull tackled the challenge of equipping their products with overload protection, electric shock prevention, and flame retardancy through innovation. Today, in the production of charging piles, Bull has achieved high-efficiency charging and integrated advanced features such as smart

noise reduction, vortex-free heat exchange, intelligent matrix electronic switch control, and high-voltage connection. These advancements cover 11 technical dimensions, with Bull applying for over 40 patents and software copyrights.

In the new energy testing laboratory, more than 20 devices, including rain test boxes and vehicle rolling testers, are in place. "Currently, Bull's charging piles feature nine layers of safety protection against overcurrent, overheating, water penetration, and lightning," said Xie. "They have undergone 78 rigorous evaluations, ensuring they can handle a wide range of complex and extreme environments."

Unlike power strips, which are straightforward to use, installing and operating charging piles is more complex. It involves integrating billing platforms and implementing intelligent control and detection systems. To address these complexities, Bull has established extensive partnerships across the supply chain, spanning hardware and software development to con-

sumer-facing applications.

In the emerging field of electric mobility, opportunities abound. Bull's electric mobility product sales have surged, increasing from tens of millions of yuan in 2021 to 150 million yuan in 2022 and surpassing 500 million yuan in 2023. This year, sales are expected to exceed 1 billion yuan. However, when compared to the group's total revenue of over 14 billion yuan and its dominant 60% market share in conventional electrical products, the electric mobility business still has significant room for growth.

"This market is far from reaching its peak, and the future looks promising," said Xie. Given the increased ownership and penetration rates of new energy vehicles, coupled with car manufacturers scaling back on the number of charging piles they provide, this gap presents a major opportunity for Bull.

"By aligning with this trend, Bull aims to capture the market with more professional products, superior services, and competitive prices," Xie concluded.

0 SPOTLIGHT

Ningbo's Unique CEE Imports Venture South to Attract New Customers

By Yan Yiran

"The Bulgarian rose shampoo and other products we showcased have attracted significant attention. Several traders from the Pearl River Delta region are interested in becoming our agents, and we are in further negotiations for cooperation," said Chen Yi, General Manager of Ningbo Dijia VIDA Trading Co., Ltd., after returning from the Marca China International Private Label Fair in Shenzhen.

The Marca China fair recently brought together over 200 top exhibitors from countries including Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. Many Shenzhen citizens attended to explore a variety of new products. Organized by CCPIT Ningbo, a delegation of Ningbo companies participated in the event, displaying items from the latest "Ningbo's Top 10 Consumer Favorite Central and Eastern European Products" list, as well as ten shortlisted finalists.

Through demonstrations and tastings, Ningbo companies presented the most popular products from Central and Eastern European countries to Shenzhen citizens, as well as to Chinese and international traders. Buyers were captivated by products such as crystal items from the Czech Republic and red wine from Slovakia, making the Ningbo exhibition area a major highlight of the fair.

Since the China-CEEC Expo began in Ningbo in 2014, numerous products from Central and Eastern European countries have gained a foothold in the Ningbo market. Over the past decade, these products have spread across the Yangtze River Delta region, reaching wider areas of the Chinese market.

"In recent years, skincare products and alcoholic beverages from Central and Eastern European countries have done well in provinces north of the Yangtze River, but their overall reach in China remains limited. Through this fair, we aim to establish partnerships with professional distributors and tap into the consumer market in southern China," said Fang Yu, General Manager of Ningbo Huaou International Supply Chain Management Co., Ltd.

"We want more people to become familiar with Central and Eastern European imports," said a representative from CCPIT Ningbo. "This is the first time Ningbo's top CEE products are being presented collectively at the Marca China fair. Our goal is to help Ningbo's unique imports expand into the Pearl River Delta region. Through international exhibitions and diverse marketing strategies, we aim to boost their popularity, expand sales, and reach a larger market."

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0 SPOTLIGHT

German Expat Launches Boutique Café in Cicheng's Village

By Zhao Yu, Jin Lu

Traveling from the historical town of Cicheng to Maoli Village and passing by Maoli Reservoir, you will come across Bamboo Coffee Roasters, a café nestled amidst a field of blooming gerberas. This unique establishment has a story as rich as its brew.

Two years ago, Frank, a German man who married a Chinese woman, came to his wife's hometown in Ningbo: Maoli Village.

Enchanted by the green hills, babbling creeks, bamboo groves, and meandering paths, Frank instantly fell in love with the area. "The environment is unique," he told our correspondent. Last year, with the birth of his daughter, Frank decided to

leave his well-paid job to start a business in Maoli, allowing him to spend more time with his family.

"We eventually decided on an old house as the location of the café, and spent a whole year restoring it," said Niuniu, Frank's wife. She said that Frank was committed to preserving the original features of the structure as much as possible.

"Except for the green flagstone on the floor by the counter, which was too worn out to be preserved, everything else, including the façade and the roof, has been meticulously restored. The village officials were very supportive of our effort to preserve the house's original integrity. They even helped us find old bricks from demolished houses that matched

our house," said Niuniu.

The logo of Bamboo Coffee Roasters was designed by Frank himself. During his daily morning jog, he enjoyed snapping photos of the Cicheng landscape and was particularly taken with the large bamboo groves near Maoli. Using these photos, Frank created a simple yet memorable drawing that became the café's logo. The name of the café, needless to say, also reflects his love of the local sights.

Bamboo Coffee Roasters opened in mid-June this year, much to the delight of the couple's friends and local community. In just two weeks, word-of-mouth attracted numerous visitors who spent entire days at the café. "My vision is to offer an escape from the city's hustle



Frank is making coffee in Bamboo Coffee Roasters.

[Photo by Chen Jiasheng]

and bustle, where people can sit and sip a cup of coffee made from beans I roasted and brewed with care," said Frank.

A cup of aromatic coffee, a piece of homemade cake, the sound of rain outside—such is the ambiance Frank wants to create.

Bamboo Coffee Roasters is the first coffee shop in the village. Even the elderly residents, who are unfamiliar with coffee culture,

come in to order their first cup.

The café also carries a significant selection of homemade marmalade and waxberry wine. "These are all made with locally-grown fruit. Frank noticed that the elderly villagers were still manually carrying heavy loads of their homegrown fruit to sell, so he wanted to help them in his own way," Niuniu told our correspondent.

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