BMW Made Record $6.4B In 2011

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FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — A sharp jump in sales of its luxury cars and sport utility vehicles in China helped German automaker BMW AG increase net profit by 51 percent last year to euro4.9 billion ($6.43 billion). The company's sales also benefited from the recovery the United States.

Revenues rose 14 percent to euro68.82 billion, as the number of vehicles sold in China increased 38 percent, to 233,600.

Sales rose 14 percent in the United States, where the company sold more than 340,000 vehicles.

Net profit fell somewhat short of the average analyst estimate compiled by FactSet of euro5.07 billion. Sales exceeded analyst estimates for euro68.4 billion.

Shares in the Munich-based company rose 1.2 percent to euro69.12 amid generally rising shares in Germany.

The company said Thursday it would raise its dividend to be paid to shareholders to euro2.30 per share from euro1.30, or just under a third of its profits.

Chief executive Norbert Reithofer said BMW "set new records in unit sales, revenue and profit and more than reached our goals."

BMW and competitors Daimler AG and Volkswagen AG have seen big profits from export sales thanks to a modest economic recovery in the United States and demand for German luxury cars in China and other emerging markets. Daimler AG, whose Mercedes-Benz brand competes with BMW, made euro6.03 billion last year, up 29 percent. Volkswagen, which owns the Audi luxury brand, reports earnings March 12 but has already said it was such a good year that it will pay its workers a record euro7,500 ($9,840) each in profit-sharing bonuses.

BMW cited stronger sales of its large 7-series sedan, which rose 4.5 percent to 68,800 and its X3 sport utility, which more than doubled its sales numbers.

At the very high end of the scale, the company's Rolls-Royce brand increased unit sales by 30 percent to 3,538 for the year.

Fourth-quarter numbers were not contained in the company's news release on Thursday. BMW will reveal more information on its earnings and outlook on March 13.

The company also announced it was appointing a woman to its top management body for the first time. Milagros Caina-Andree, 49, will take responsibility for

personnel matters on the eight-member management board.

The Spanish-born Caina-Andree has until now been a personnel executive at rail company Deutsche Bahn AG.

Public discussion has grown in Germany and Europe about the lack of top female managers in big companies. The European Commission is considering imposing a mandatory quota for the number of women on company boards.

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