

# Ford Recruits Bell to Coach Focus Drivers at Clinic

DEARBORN – Ford confirmed last week that consumers attending the Focus Global Test Drive in February in Madrid will be hosted and coached by road racing veteran Justin Bell. With a career stretching more than 20 years, Bell will bring a wealth of experiences and skills to the Global Test Drive program.

Bell teamed with his father – veteran driver Derek Bell – in the 24 Hours of Le Mans from 1992 to 1996 and has participated in the Trans-Am series and in the American Le Mans Series. He was FIA GT champion in the GT2 class in 1997, a class winner in the 1998 24 Hours of Le Mans and 2001 Trans-Am rookie of the year.

Since 2008, Bell has been an on-air personality on Speed Channel and served as celebrity driving instructor on the “Jay Leno Show” with Ford Focus Electric prototype vehicle demonstrations.

Bell will help host Focus Global Test Drive participants at the National Institute for Aerospace Technology (INTA) near Madrid. An aeronautical research facility, INTA and its varied surfaces make an ideal location for dynamic driving events. Ford plans to announce additional celebrity hosts for this inaugural event.

“Running an instructional program for race drivers for several years represents one of my most rewarding experiences,” said Bell.

“Our test driver guests will be getting a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience behind the wheel of the all-new Focus, and I look forward to helping each of them have some fun and find their groove as we put the new Focus through its paces.”

At the three-day event, Feb. 18-20, 2011, consumers and



Justin Bell

bloggers will be able to experience the Ford Focus in a unique new manner. Each challenge and course will highlight the driving dynamics and technologies in the vehicle. And throughout the entire event, local charities will benefit.

To participate in the Focus Global Test Drive, friends and fans from around the world are invited to submit simple video applications explaining why they should be included in this unique behind-the-scenes event. The application process invites prospective test drivers to “start more than a car” by generating the market equivalent of \$10,000 for a specific charity of their choice from the categories of hunger, education and environment/sustainability.

Details of the Focus Global Test Drive application are now available on the “Global Drive” tab at <http://facebook.com/fordfocus>. Participants for the Global Test Drive event will be selected based on a range of criteria including their individual creative content, social networking vibrancy and volume of votes they receive.

With the Focus Global Test



Justin Bell will support a Ford event in Spain.

Drive, there is something for everyone. Ford engineers will get rapid feedback from interested customers and prospects; drivers get a first look at the new car before it goes on sale; friends get to come along for the ride of a lifetime; and deserving charities will benefit in a big way.

The all-new Ford Focus is

the result of a global product development program bringing together Ford’s best engineers and technologies from around the world. Focus will be nearly identical in all 122 world markets in which it will eventually be sold, with 80 percent parts commonality.

Rollout of the all-new Focus will begin in early 2011.

# Fisker Partners to Sell Karma EVs Across China

SHANGHAI (AP) – Electric car maker Fisker Automotive plans to sell its luxury Karma model in China, teaming up with a local distributor of top auto brands.

Irvine, California-based Fisker has reached an agreement with vehicle retailer and service provider China Grand Automotive Group to sell Fisker vehicles in its more than 200 outlets, which carry such brands as Mercedes-Benz, Lexus and Lamborghini.

The Fisker Karma is due to debut in China at the Shanghai Auto show next April and to begin deliveries by the autumn, the company said in a release seen last week on its website.

The hybrid sedan has a total range of 483 kilometers (300 miles) and can travel 80 kilometers (50 miles) on electricity alone.

The first factory built Karma debuted at the Paris auto show in October.

“With its vast network of experienced retailers CGA will give Fisker an instant and credible footprint in the region,” said Henrik Fisker, Fisker’s CEO.

He said China’s fast growing market and keenness to reduce smog make it a good potential market for Fisker. Though most Chinese car buyers purchase economy or mid-range vehicles, there is a relatively large and growing pool of affluent car aficionados who opt for flashy luxury sedans and sports cars.

China is promoting use of electric vehicles with subsidies and other incentives, but has yet to construct a widespread system of charging stations and other infrastructure – one factor behind the relatively low level of interest so far in purchasing electric and hybrid vehicles in a market that is forecast to grow 30 percent this year.

China Grand Automotive, one of five international distributors for Fisker, estimates its 2010 sales at 50 billion yuan (\$7.5 billion).

The company is a joint venture between Xinjiang Guanghui Industry Investment (Group) Co., a diversified property and energy group, and Texas-based private equity firm TPG Newbridge Capital LLC.

# Toyota to Pay \$32 Million More in Fines to NHTSA

By KEN THOMAS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) – Toyota Motor Corp. has agreed to pay the U.S. government a record \$32.4 million in additional fines to settle an investigation into its handling of two recalls at the heart of its safety crisis, a person familiar with the case told The Associated Press.

The civil penalties will settle investigations into how Toyota dealt with recalls over accelerator pedals that could get trapped in floor mats and steering relay rods that could break and lead to drivers losing control. The person spoke on condition of anonymity in advance of a formal announcement.

The latest settlement, on top of a \$16.4 million fine Toyota paid earlier in a related investigation, brings the total penalties levied on the company to \$48.8 million. It caps a difficult year for the world’s No. 1 automaker, which recalled more than 11 million vehicles globally since the fall of 2009 as it scrambled to protect its reputation for safety and reliability.

Toyota’s board of directors agreed to pay the fines on Tuesday at the company’s board meeting in Japan, according to an official familiar with the case, and the company said it agreed to the penalties without admitting to any violations of U.S. laws. However, that does not free Toyota from potential civil and criminal penalties in private lawsuits and other federal investigations.

The person had spoken earlier Monday on condition of anonymity ahead of the formal announcement.

Steve St. Angelo, Toyota’s chief quality officer for North America, said in a statement that the company has

“worked very hard over the past year to put these issues behind us and set a new standard of responsiveness to our customers. These agreements are an opportunity to turn the page to an even more constructive relationship with NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).”

He said Toyota was grateful to its customers for “their confidence in the quality and reliability of our vehicles.”

In April, Toyota agreed to pay the maximum fine allowed under law for a single case – \$16.4 million – for failing to promptly alert U.S. regulators to safety problems over sticking accelerator pedals. Under federal law, automakers must notify the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration within five days of determining that a safety defect exists and promptly conduct a recall.

At the time, Toyota denied attempting to hide a safety defect and said it agreed to the penalty to avoid a lengthy legal battle with the government.

Jesse Toprak, vice president of industry trends and insight at TrueCar, an automotive consulting firm in Santa Monica, California, said Toyota was trying to put its recalls behind it at a time when the company’s U.S. sales have been flat while many rivals have taken advantage of a recovering auto landscape. But he said the rebuilding of the trust would take time.

“It’s going to be a far lengthier process. Consumer loyalty is not what it used to be. The choices are plentiful now,” he said.

The latest fines involve two separate safety problems affecting certain Toyota passenger cars and trucks.

The first case deals with recalls in 2009 and 2010 of

about 5 million Toyota and Lexus vehicles with gas pedals that could become entrapped in floor mats. Toyota had recalled 55,000 all-weather floor mats in 2007 to address pedal entrapment, but the government said its investigation found that simply removing the floor mats was insufficient.

A high-speed crash involving a Lexus in August 2009 killed four people near San Diego, prompting the government to investigate the recall. After reviewing crash evidence and other data, NHTSA investigators concluded that Toyota failed to notify the government about a known safety defect within five days.

In the second case, Toyota conducted a recall in 2004 of Hilux trucks in Japan with steering relay rods that could break and affect steering. Toyota told U.S. regulators in 2004 that the safety problem was limited to vehicles in Japan and the company had not received similar complaints in the U.S.

But a year later, Toyota told NHTSA the steering defect was also found in several U.S. models and recalled nearly 1 million vehicles. NHTSA said in May 2010 it learned about complaints from U.S. consumers that Toyota failed to disclose to the government when it conducted the recall

in Japan in 2004.

Toyota turned over thousands of documents to the government as part of the investigation. The two most recent fines are also the maximum allowed under law, and are adjusted for inflation.

“Safety is our top priority and we take our responsibility to protect consumers seriously,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. “I am pleased that Toyota agreed to pay the maximum possible penalty and I expect Toyota to work cooperatively in the future to ensure consumers’ safety.”

The Japanese automaker faces dozens of lawsuits from families of people killed or injured in crashes linked to unintended acceleration. The government’s safety agency has received about 3,000 reports of sudden acceleration incidents involving Toyota vehicles during the past decade, including 93 deaths. NHTSA, however, has confirmed only the four deaths from the California crash.

Toyota says their recalls have directly addressed the safety problems with their vehicles and the company is making progress in responding to concerns. The company has established engineering teams to examine cars that are the subject of consumer complaints.

# EPA Approves Icom’s Use Of Ford 6.8-Liter Engine

NEW HUDSON, Mich. – Icom North America, a developer and manufacturer of liquid injection propane systems for commercial and consumer vehicles, has attained the first such U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval for its Liquid Propane Bi-Fuel systems for the Ford 6.8-liter engines, produced for Ford Econoline vans.

Ralph Perpetuini, CEO of Icom North America, said his company was given the green light by the EPA to convert applicable Ford 6.8-liter gasoline engines for E-250, E-350 and E-450 platforms covering model years 2010 and 2011 for propane and gasoline (or, bi-fuel) use.

Most end users of this technology will be commercial fleets of ambulances, shuttle buses, flatbeds, cutaways and cargo vehicles.

“This is the first time the EPA has certified a bi-fuel engine system using liquid propane injection,” Perpetuini noted.

“We believe propane is the most energy-efficient and practical alternative fuel currently available.

“Coupled with gasoline in a bi-fuel engine, propane gives fleet owners the option of refueling with either fuel, providing extended range,” he added.

“This is ideal for the fleet user who has numerous delivery vehicles, including those with small fleets at many locations.”

Since 2004, Icom North America has been supplying its patented JTG liquid-injection propane mono-fuel systems to leading bus, truck and commercial vehicle manufacturers in the U.S.

Perpetuini said that Icom will add 8-10 new positions later this year at its manufacturing facility in New Hudson, Mich., where the company already has begun production of the EPA-certified, bi-fuel conversion system for existing customers.

Albert Venezio, chairman of Icom North America, said, “The patented Icom JTG approach is revolutionary. It injects liquid propane (not vapor) through an actual injector in the vehicle’s manifold.”

“The vehicle’s OEM powertrain control module (or brain) directly controls our system, eliminating the need

for additional computer mapping. Installation is fast and simple,” he said.

Currently, propane fuel is used primarily on commercial vehicles. But Icom’s proprietary vehicle-conversion systems can be used on any gasoline, fuel-injected car or truck including taxis, police vehicles or passenger cars.

Icom’s patented JTG liquid-propane injection application is a fully integrated, mon-fuel or bi-fuel engine system designed in harmony with OEM gasoline engines.

“When utilizing the Icom JTG system, drivability, performance and torque are equal to or better than gasoline,” Venezio said.

Mike Stone, Icom’s vehicle technical manager, noted, “Our emission results were excellent and the Icom JTG system required no powertrain control module calibrations. Were are the first system certified to do so.”

EPA certifications for the E-Series Ford engines paves the way for additional commercial fleet users to consider bi-fuel applications as an ideal way to power vehicles used for long distances.

# TD-Bank Buys Chrysler Financial

TORONTO (AP) – Toronto-Dominion Bank has agreed to buy Chrysler Financial, the automaker’s old lending arm, from private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management LP for \$6.3 billion.

Cerberus acquired the lender when it bought most of the automaker for \$7.4 billion in 2007. Cerberus lost control of Chrysler when the automaker nearly ran out of cash and faced liquidation in 2008.

The automaker was saved by a U.S. government bailout. It went through bankruptcy protection last year, and the government turned control over to Italy’s Fiat SpA. Cerberus kept ownership of Chrysler Financial.

TD wants to expand its loan business, and said the deal will give it access to technology that can process more than 2 million credit applications per year. The auto lending market hasn’t taken as much of a hit as other kinds of consumer loans over the last several years. And the value of used cars is picking up as

the economy improves.

The deal is the latest example of Canadian banks using their muscle to snap up U.S. institutions battered by the financial crisis. Last Friday the Bank of Montreal announced it is buying Milwaukee-based bank Marshall & Ilsley Corp. for \$4.1 billion in stock.

Canadian banks are investing in the U.S. from a position of strength, as they weathered the economic crisis far better than their counterparts in other countries. In a concentrated banking system dominated by five major players, Canadian banks have been looking across the border to find growth opportunities.

Toronto-Dominion Bank, Canada’s second largest bank, has expanded its U.S. presence in recent years with the purchase of New Jersey-based Commerce Bancorp in what has been its largest acquisition.

TD also bought smaller, troubled banks in the Carolinas and Florida such as South Carolina-based South Finan-

cial Group. Earlier this year, TD agreed to buy the risky assets of three insolvent Florida banks worth \$3.8 billion. TD didn’t have a presence in U.S. six years ago, but now has about 1,300 branches in the U.S. compared to about 1,100 in Canada.

TD Bank expects to rebrand Chrysler Financial under the TD name by spring 2011.

The acquisition is expected to add about \$100 million in adjusted earnings in 2012, the first full year of operations.

The deal should close in TD’s fiscal 2011 second quarter, the companies predict, pending regulatory approvals and other conditions. Chrysler Financial will maintain its Toronto headquarters and its top executive, CEO Tom Gilman, after the deal closes.

A TD spokesman said the purchase is comprised of net assets of US\$5.9 billion and approximately US\$400 million in goodwill.

Chrysler Financial has been in relative limbo until this announced acquisition.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Ice carver Matt Sokolowski of Michigan Ice carves the logo for the 2011 Motown Winter Blast, which will be held in February, 2011.

# 2011 Winter Blast Fest Will Bring People to City

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region, support local businesses and help unite neighbors in a common cause. Wayne County is proud to be home to Winter Blast.”

And for the second consecutive year, Winter Blast will partner with Human Matrix Services and the Grosse Pointe Rotary in support of “Breaking the ICE on the Cycle of Poverty Program.”

Volunteers from each organization will help collect non-perishable food items, new clothing and books at the festival gates as part of a special Detroit’s Winter Blast voluntary “admission fee.”

All of these donated items

from the public will be used to support a massive service project that will fight hunger across the metropolitan Detroit area.

Organizers noted that last year, more than 600,000 lbs. of items were collected and this year the festival wants to exceed that earlier mark.

Said event organizer Witz, “The support from our new sponsors is a huge lift for the festival. It’s great to see the General Motors Foundation and Blue Cross Blue Shield so involved in Detroit.”

“The new activities brought to the festival by Radio Disney AM 910 and DMC Children’s Hospital of Michigan will truly bolster our family offerings.”