

Automakers Recall 20 Million Vehicles in 2010

By KEN THOMAS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Automakers recalled about 20 million vehicles in 2010, led by high-profile recalls by Toyota that prompted new scrutiny of the auto industry's safety record.

The number of recalls this year was the largest in the United States since 2004, according to an analysis of federal data by The Associated Press. The auto industry set a record with 30.8 million recalled vehicles that year.

Toyota Motor Corp. recalled about 7.1 million vehicles in 2010 to fix faulty gas pedals, floor mats that could trap accelerators, defective braking and stalling engines. The safety woes by the world's No. 1 automaker brought more attention to auto safety from government regulators and the public, which filed more than 64,000 complaints with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, nearly double the number in a typical year.

Safety recalls can cost car companies tens of millions of dollars or more and have become more common since 2000, when Congress passed legislation to spot safety defects more quickly in the aftermath of the massive Firestone tire recalls. In 2010, lawmakers held several hearings on the Toyota recalls but sweeping legislation to increase penalties against car companies, require automakers to meet new safety standards and empower the government to demand a recall stalled in Congress.

Toyota was fined \$48.8 million by the government for its handling of three recalls dating back to 2004. Toyota has vowed to take a more proactive approach to safety, creating engineering teams that can quickly examine cars that are the subject of consumer

American Axle Makes Moves At India Unit

DETROIT — American Axle & Manufacturing (AAM), last week announced that it has assumed full ownership of the AAM Sona Axle Private Limited Joint Venture (AAM Sona Axle), in Pantnagar, India.

AAM Sona Axle, previous a joint venture between Detroit-based AAM and Sona Koyo Ltd. to manufacture and sell light truck, passenger car and SUV axle assemblies for the India market, is now an independent company wholly owned by American Axle.

The ownership transfer will not affect day-to-day operations at AAM Sona Axle.

"AAM remains totally committed to India and our customers in this important global market. As a wholly owned entity, we now have greater flexibility to pursue a wide range of opportunities in India," said David C. Dauch, president and COO of American Axle.

"I am counting on continued good relations with the Sona Group, whose local expertise has been very important to AAM as we have established our business in India."

Sona Koyo is India's largest such manufacturer of steering columns with a market share exceeding 45 percent. Sona Koyo supplies gears, steering columns and rack-and-pinion steering assemblies, as well as electric-powered assisted steering, to a majority of India's car and utility vehicle manufacturers.

Dr. Surinder Kapur, chairman, Sona Group, said, "In light of the challenging times, corporations must focus more than ever on those things that make them successful."

He added, "The decision to dissolve the joint venture is a result of an amicable and mutual agreement between the partners. We intend to maintain close relations with AAM in order to explore doing business together in the future."

American Axle is a world leader in the manufacture, engineering, design and validation of driveline and drivetrain systems and related components and modules, chassis systems and other vehicle products.

complaints while giving its U.S. offices a more direct role in safety related decisions.

Toyota spokesman Brian Lyons said the company has "committed to be more responsive to our customers and federal agencies" and its recalled vehicles are getting fixed at a faster rate than the industry average of 72 percent recall completion after 18 months.

Among other automakers, General Motors Co. recalled about 4 million vehicles in 2010 while Japanese rivals Honda and Nissan both re-

Chrysler Sales Rise 17 Percent in 2010

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North American International Auto Show in Detroit.

Also in December, five Chrysler Group vehicles — the new Dodge Avenger, Dodge Journey, Chrysler 200, Jeep Grand Cherokee and Jeep Patriot — were named Top Safety Picks for 2011 by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Chrysler finished the month with a 63-day supply of inventory (235,454 units). U.S. industry sales figures for December are projected at an estimated 12.9 SAAR.

The Jeep brand posted a 49 percent sales increase compared with the same month a year ago. Sales of the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the brand's volume leader, increased 211 percent in December versus a year ago.

The Jeep Wrangler and the Jeep Patriot both posted double-digit percentage sales increases in December compared with the same month in 2009.

For the year, Jeep brand sales were up 26 percent versus sales in 2009.

The 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee, showered with accolades during the year, was named in December a finalist for the 2011 North American Truck of the Year award. The all-new 2011 Dodge Durango was also named a finalist for this prestigious award. The winners will be announced at

called more than 2 million cars and trucks. Chrysler recalled about 1.5 million vehicles and Ford called back more than 500,000 vehicles. The recall data was preliminary and the government was expected to release final numbers next year.

"More and more recalls are being voluntarily initiated by automakers and we think that's a good sign," Transportation Department spokeswoman Olivia Alair said last week.

"Safety is NHTSA's first priority and improved coopera-

a news conference at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit.

The awards are unique in the United States because, instead of being given by a single media outlet, they are awarded by a coalition of automotive journalists from the United States and Canada who represent magazines, television, radio, newspapers and websites.

The Ram Truck brand posted an 87 percent sales increase in December. The Light Duty Ram, Heavy Duty Ram and Ram Chassis Cab all posted significant sales increases in December, compared with the same month in 2009. The Dakota pickup truck also fared well in December, posting a 67 percent increase.

The Ram Truck brand posted a 9 percent sales increase in 2010, compared with sales in 2009.

The brand concluded the year with two significant awards. *AUTOMOBILE Magazine* named the Ram 1500 to its annual list of All-Stars. It marked the second consecutive year that the Ram 1500 was named to the list. The magazine praised the Ram Truck for both its ruggedness and refinement.

Also, *Off-Road Adventures* magazine named Ram Truck as Manufacturer of the Year. In its December 2010 issue, *Off-Road Adventures* credits Ram Truck's commitment to

tion from automakers will help resolve safety issues more quickly and comprehensively."

Wade Newton, a spokesman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, which represents a dozen car companies, including GM, Toyota and Ford, said automakers "are doing a better job of identifying and pinpointing safety-related issues and taking faster action."

He said safety advances in new vehicles helped traffic deaths decline last year to its lowest levels since 1950.

advanced design and proven powertrains for the honor. The magazine went on to praise Ram Heavy Duty's 5.7-liter HEMI and 6.7-liter Cummins Turbo Diesel powertrains.

Sales of the Dodge Grand Caravan, the brand's volume leader, increased 67 percent in December, compared with the same month in 2009.

Sales of the Dodge Nitro mid-size sport utility were up 104 percent in December, while sales of the Dodge Challenger muscle car were up 31 percent.

The first sales of the all-new 2011 Dodge Durango — a finalist for 2011 North American Truck of the Year award — began in late December. In 2010, Dodge brand sales increased 17 percent, compared with sales in 2009.

Sales of the Chrysler Town & Country minivan, the brand's volume leader, were up 16 percent in December compared with the same month in 2009. Chrysler brand sales increased 12 percent during 2010, versus 2009 sales.

The Chrysler brand, fresh off the introduction of its new Chrysler 200 mid-size sedan at the Los Angeles Auto Show, finished the year on another high note, launching its all-new 2011 Chrysler 300 series in December.

The Chrysler 300 series will be officially unveiled publicly this month.

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P.O. Box 2040
Dearborn, Michigan 48123
313-565-5500

Info@SpringerPublishing.com

Gerald Scott, Editorial Dept.
News@SpringerPublishing.com

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GM Sales VP Johnson: 'We Sold More Vehicles with 4 Brands In 2010 Than with 8 in 2009'

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Johnson reflected on the "new" GM strategy that includes designing groundbreaking vehicles like the Chevrolet Volt, aligning its capacity with demand, a leaner dealer body, lowered incentive costs, and fewer brands.

"We sold more vehicles with four brands in 2010 than we did with eight in 2009," said Johnson.

All four brands saw sales increases in December.

Chevrolet upped its production of Equinox and the results paid off with a 19 percent sales increase for the month.

"We lead the segment with more fuel-efficient, stylish crossovers than anyone else," said Johnson, who added that passenger car sales also increased — by 20 percent — compared with the same month last year.

Chevrolet's overall total sales year-to-date were up 16 percent.

Buick saw a total sales increase of 40 percent for December, with a year-to-date increase of 52 percent. December was the best sales month for

the Buick Regal since its launch.

GMC had a stellar year, said Johnson, with the Terrain leading the way. The Terrain's retail sales were 356 percent higher year-to-date. GMC total sales were up 29 percent for the year.

Cadillac had its eleventh consecutive month of sales increases. "Cadillac is the fastest-growing luxury brand," said Johnson, who said the brand's SRX and STS coupe and wagon had their best sales month ever. Cadillac's total sales for the year were up 35 percent.

"Our December sales were very good," said Johnson. "We feel very good about the year we had."

Johnson said the average vehicle age is increasing and subsequently the pent-up demand will benefit the industry in the new year.

Johnson added that the Chevrolet Cruze and soon to be launched Chevrolet Sonic will be important vehicles in the new year.

"Our outlook is quite optimistic," said Johnson. "We look forward to the new year, a year we think will be an important one as we recover."

Will Camaro Turn Heads at 2035 Woodward Cruise?

by Stefanie Carano
Staff Reporter
Detroit Auto Scene

The 2010 Chevrolet Camaro has been predicted to be a car pined after by future collectors and enthusiasts, according to the Friends of the National Automotive History Collection (NAHC) at the Detroit Public Library.

Each year, the organization, whose mission is to support the National Automotive History Collection at the Detroit Public Library's Rose and Robert Skillman Branch, chooses a recipient of the Collectible Car of the Future award.

This year, they decided on the Camaro, Chevy's sports car refreshed for the 2010 model year. The selection was due to its unique styling and sporty look. The award was given Dec. 9 at the Skillman Branch and was presented to Tom Peters, Camaro chief designer.

GM Sells 250+ Chevrolet Volts in Its First Month

By SHARON SILKE CARTY
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — They say 2010 was the year General Motors Co. and Nissan made good on their promise to bring mass-produced electric cars to the market. But don't count on seeing one in traffic soon. Sales so far have been microscopic and they're likely to stay that way for some time because of limited supplies.

GM sold between 250 and 350 Chevy Volts this month and Nissan's sales totaled less than 10 Leaf sedans in the past two weeks. Production for both is slowly ramping up.

It will be well into 2012 before both the Volt and Leaf are available nationwide. And if you're interested in buying one, you'll need to get behind the 50,000 people already on waiting lists.

It's still unclear just how large the market for electric cars will be once those early adopters are supplied. The base sticker price is \$40,280 for the Volt and \$32,780 for

"I thought they did a very nice job recreating the Camaro after several years of being absent from the marketplace," said Mike Davis, automotive historian and member of the NAHC.

"There's pretty good competitors out there, but what makes it more likely is it's a sporty coupe, it's nostalgic in its own way. I'm an old Ford guy with Ford blue in my blood, but I put in for the Camaro. The sporty coupe makes it more likely to be a collectible than the four-door sedan."

The Camaro's selection is all the more impressive when it's noted that the Camaro brand was out of the pony car market from 2003-09, returning with a splash last year.

Other nominations for this year's future collectible car award included domestics Buick LaCrosse, Cadillac SRX, Ford Fiesta and Lincoln MKT, as well as the Acura ZDX, Honda Accord Crosstour and



Friends of the National Automotive Historic Collection named the 2010 Chevrolet Camaro "Collectible Car of the Future."

Hyundai Sonata among the foreign automakers.

Davis said he doesn't think import vehicles are ever going to be popular among the collectors.

"It depends on who collects the cars, who restores the old cars and why they do it," he said.

Charles K. Hyde, chairman of the NAHC Board of Trustees, said in a statement

Chiat Day, followed Heeren and his family around as they picked up their silver-colored Leaf, and have posted a video on the Leaf's Facebook page. Not surprisingly, Heeren is a fan. "What's amazed me the most in driving it is that it's just a car, like any other car," he said.

The Leaf is the only all-electric car on the market. It can travel about 100 miles (160 kilometers) on battery power before needing to be recharged. Using a standard outlet, that takes 16 to 18 hours. Nissan Motor Co. recommends that Leaf owners install a 220/240-volt outlet in their homes so they can recharge in about seven hours.

Japan-based Nissan initially sent only 10 Leafs to the U.S. and spokesman David Reuter said a second shipment of around 90 cars that arrived by cargo ship on Dec. 23 is on the way to dealers. Nissan won't give estimates on how many Leaf sedans it expects to sell in the U.S. next year,

to the press, "This selection is unique among all the 'Vehicle of the Year' awards, because it is selected by 'car buffs' who know what future collectors will value. We asked our members to predict which of this year's new vehicles will turn heads in the Woodward Cruise of 2035."

Last year, the organization named the 2009 Ford Flex the Collectible Car of the Future.

but says it has capacity to make 50,000 annually at a plant in Oppama, Japan. Those will be sold in Japan, the U.S. and Europe.

The Volt goes about 40 miles on battery power alone before needing to be recharged. But it comes with a backup gas engine that GM says can extend its range to 375 miles as it kicks in to recharge the batteries on the fly. GM believes the backup generator will make it a hit with customers who worry about being stranded with a dead battery.

The Volts are being assembled in Detroit. GM predicts it will sell 10,000 of them in 2011 and between 35,000 and 45,000 in 2012. By way of comparison, Chevrolet sold 187,250 Malibu sedans in the first 11 months of the year with sticker prices that start at \$21,975.

Hybrids made up 2.4 percent of U.S. sales this year and the category that includes hybrids and electric cars is expected to double to 4.8 per-

'Pay-by-Phone' Car Parking Is Introduced at Dearborn Lot

Parkmobile USA announced recently a revolutionary new service that will allow residents and visitors in Dearborn to save time and money by using their mobile phone to pay for parking at meters in the city's West Downtown District.

Phase I of the program will begin in metered Lot H, located at West Village Drive between Mason and Monroe, south of Michigan Avenue.

To use the new Parkmobile system, customers register for free at parkmobile.com.

Once registered, motorists can use a mobile app, the Internet, or a toll-free call (800) 280-4146 to pay for parking on the spot.

After setting up the account, customers can immediately start using the system with their registered mobile phone. Motorists can also select the option to receive text message alerts and reminders 15 minutes before their running meter time expires.

"We're pleased to offer this innovation to make it even more convenient for people to visit the stores, night spots and restaurants in our west downtown," said Mayor John B. O'Reilly, Jr. in December.

"We want to deliver services for the way people live their lives now, and phone applications are a big part of that."

Meanwhile, parking in Lot H currently costs 50 cents per hour. There is a small transaction fee of 35 cents for using the convenience of the pay by phone system, or customers can choose a flat rate of \$3 (where the transaction fee is automatically included) to park from 5 p.m. to closing time.

"Parkmobile is very excited to launch our pay-by-phone parking service with the city of Dearborn," said Albert Bogaard, president and CEO of Parkmobile USA.

The program kicked off earlier in December.