

GM Hot on Toyota's Heels In Global Car Sales Race

By TOM KRISHER and YURI KAGEYAMA, Of the Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors Co. sold more cars and trucks in China last year than it did in the U.S., for the first time in the company's 102-year history.

But despite GM's gains in China, Toyota Motor Corp. managed to hold onto the title of world's largest automaker. The Japanese company reported 8.42 million sales worldwide last year. That's 30,000 more than GM's 8.39 million in global sales for 2010.

GM expects its sales growth to continue, and industry analysts say it may dethrone Toyota as the global sales leader this year.

The news came the same day that GM announced it was adding a shift and workers to an assembly plant in Flint, that makes hot-selling pickup trucks.

GM and Toyota tied for the global sales lead in 2007, ending GM's 76-year string of dominance. Toyota took the title in 2008 and has held it

ever since, but last year's string of embarrassing safety recalls and a resurgent GM combined to make the race close again.

"General Motors is going strong, and it's a sure sign of its re-emergence," said Yasuaki Iwamoto, auto analyst with Okasan Securities Co. in Tokyo.

GM spokesman Tom Henderson said the company isn't focusing on the global unit sales race with Toyota.

"A financially healthy and sustainable business that benefits our customers, stakeholders and employees takes precedence over any ranking. Our motivation is to be the best global company and let the numbers speak for themselves," he said.

GM's global sales figure for 2010 was a dramatic 12 percent increase from 2009, a year in which it closed factories and was forced to take aid from the U.S. government to survive. Its sales in the U.S., including heavy-duty vehicles, rose 6.3 percent.

But it did even better in China, selling 2.35 million vehicles there, up 29 percent as

an expanding middle class gained wealth, making it the world's largest car market. The showing in China was about 136,000 more than what GM sold in the U.S. Toyota, meanwhile, sold just 846,000 vehicles in China.

GM said it achieved double-digit jumps in five of its top 10 markets last year, including China. GM marked a 12.4 percent sales rise in Russia and a 10.4 percent rise in Brazil.

Separately, GM said Monday it will add a third shift to a pickup truck assembly plant in Flint, Mich., to meet demand for heavy-duty pickups.

Pickup truck sales in the U.S. were up 16 percent last year to 1.6 million vehicles, and they're still among the top-selling vehicles in the

country. GM says small businesses are beginning to buy pickups again after staying out of the market for nearly two years.

The company said the expansion will generate 750 jobs for the Flint plant, which makes Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra pickups and has been operating on two shifts per day. The last time the plant worked around the clock was in the second quarter of 2008.

GM will fill the shift by recalling laid off workers who will start arriving in the second quarter. It expects to hire no new employees.

The Flint factory employs about 2,100 hourly and salaried workers. It made 115,000 trucks last year.

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GM's New Product Chief Faces Many Challenges

By TOM KRISHER
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The new chief of product development at GM holds what is arguably the most important job in the company: coming up with cars and trucks that people want.

There also are a few extra goals on Mary Barra's list: Make the stuff faster and raise its quality.

Barra, a 30-year veteran of General Motors, was named head of global product development recently. She replaces Vice Chairman Tom Stephens who was moved aside after GM's CEO grew unhappy over the speed with which new vehicles reached the market.

She'll look for ways to more efficiently run a giant operation that includes 36,000 people across the globe, she said in an interview with The Associated Press. She also wants vehicles with more compelling exterior designs, the latest technology, and she promises to work with manufacturing and parts supply companies to boost quality.

Barra wouldn't say how much time she'd like to shave from product development, which typically takes four or five years.

With other automakers cranking out new models faster and faster, it's critical for GM to respond with fresh cars and trucks because older models don't sell as well as those with the latest designs and gadgets.

The typical five-year wait for new models probably is too long, but GM could do significant updates in a much shorter period, said Rebecca Lindland, director of automotive research with consulting firm IHS Automotive.

"Everybody is going to be coming to market with products sooner," she said. "With technology being more and more integrated into a vehicle, you can be obsolete before you know it."

New Chairman and CEO Dan Akerson told reporters last week that GM's 2009 bankruptcy put the company a year behind in vehicle development, and he wanted to bring out new cars and trucks faster. He said in a statement that Barra will bring a "fresh perspective" to the critically important job.

Bankruptcy sidetracked new pickup trucks, among GM's top-selling vehicles, and it delayed a replacement for the aging Chevrolet Impala large sedan.

Barra, 49, has been vice president of global human resources since 2009, helping the company through management turmoil that included four chief executives in less than two years. She also served as a plant manager and held a number of engineering and management posts, even heading internal communications.

Longtime GM executives have been criticized for moving too slowly in the company's rule-heavy culture. Barra said her long career at GM

will be an asset.

"I have a rich vehicle background and I know the company," she said. "I know what works. I know what doesn't work."

Barra started at GM in 1980 while attending engineering school.

In her new post, Barra will manage the company's global alliances, such as those in China and Korea. She'll oversee a pipeline of cars and trucks for GM's 11 global brands, including Chevrolet, Buick, GMC and Cadillac in the U.S.

Barra wouldn't talk about specific products. She wants to assess what's in the works and see how new models can be accelerated.

Earlier this week Akerson cleared the spot for Barra by moving Stephens to a new post as chief technology officer. The move was part of a broader management shake-up that included the ouster of GM's OnStar chief and elevation of several marketing executives.

Stephens, a 42-year GM veteran, lost responsibility for product planning in a shake-up last year, but remained in charge of global technology.



Marc Keinath's 2004 Chevrolet Malibu sits crushed at a towing yard in Montrose following a severe accident with a tractor-trailer in which Keinath miraculously survived.

Survivor of Semi-Trailer Crash Thanks Chevy for Making Malibu, Gets New One

DETROIT — Marc Keinath miraculously survived an icy encounter with a tractor-trailer last week. His 2004 Malibu didn't, but Chevrolet wrote the next chapter in the amazing story, presenting Keinath with the keys to a new 2011 Chevrolet Malibu.

"This is an incredible story of survival that shows you just never know what's going to happen on the road," said Rick Scheidt, executive director at Chevrolet. "When you look at Marc's Malibu, you would never expect anyone would ever walk away from it."

Keinath, 30, of Millington, Mich., was driving his 2004 Chevrolet Malibu along Interstate 75 in Genesee County, Mich., when he encountered a patch of black ice and spun out. When he regained control of the car, the tractor-trailer hauling 20 tons of sugar smashed into the rear of Keinath's Malibu before falling on top of it. As parts of the roof of the Malibu began to yield under the tremendous weight of the trailer, Keinath fully reclined his



Dodge Brand President and CEO Ralph Gilles unveiled the all-new 2011 Dodge Charger at the Los Angeles Auto Show last November.

Chrysler 300 and Charger Lauded for Crash Safety

AUBURN HILLS — Two new Chrysler Group LLC vehicles, the 2011 Chrysler 300 and the 2011 Dodge Charger, have been named Top Safety Picks for 2011 by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).

It's the first time both vehicles have achieved the highest ratings.

IIHS recognizes vehicles with outstanding crashworthiness in front, side, rollover and rear crashes.

The new Chrysler 300 and Dodge Charger both received "good" ratings, the highest achievable, in all four categories.

The Chrysler 300 and Dodge Charger join five other Chrysler Group LLC vehicles that were named Top Safety Picks by the IIHS in December.

Dodge Avenger and Journey, Jeep Grand Cherokee and Patriot — when equipped with optional side airbags — and the Chrysler 200, were recognized for superior crashworthiness

(how well a vehicle protects its occupants in a crash).

To be considered, vehicles must have available electronic stability control (ESC) systems that significantly reduce crash risks. Both the Chrysler 300 and Dodge Charger have standard ESC.

Other standard safety features include full-length side curtain airbags, seat-mounted side thorax air bags, driver's knee bag, front-row reactive head restraints, Hill Start Assist, Rain Brake Support and Ready Alert Braking.

"With the addition of the new Chrysler 300 and Dodge Charger, Chrysler Group now has seven Top Safety Picks in the 2011 model year," said Scott Kunselman, senior vice president — Engineering, Chrysler Group LLC.

"This recognition by the IIHS underscores our commitment to safety across all vehicle segments.

"As we continue our product transformation, we'll con-

tinue to engineer safety leadership and more capabilities into all our vehicles."

Both the new Chrysler 300 and Dodge Charger employ a two-fold approach to safety with active safety items, such as electronic stability control and anti-lock brakes, as well as passive safety features, including head restraints for front seat occupants and supplemental side-curtain or side seat airbags.

"Automakers deserve credit for quickly rising to meet more challenging criteria for Top Safety Pick," says Adrian Lund,

IIHS's president.

"That gives consumers shopping for a safer new car or SUV — from economy to luxury — plenty of choices to consider when they visit a dealer showroom."

Note that Chrysler's passenger car lineup has come under criticism in recent years for outdated looks and quality concerns, so the automaker says that these most recent IIHS safety ratings are perhaps a tacit endorsement that its overall vehicle fleet is headed in the right marketing direction after all.



2011 Chrysler 200 convertible

Chrysler 200 Convertible Is a Real Head-Turner

Chrysler last week released photos of the new 2011 Chrysler 200 Convertible. The 200 Convertible offers consumers an open-air driving experience featuring elegant craftsmanship inside and out, a fun, yet refined driving experience, innovative technology, an abundance of standard safety features and an extraordinary level of standard content.

The 2011 Chrysler 200 Convertible is an exciting alternative for customers who want the benefits of a coupe and the true open-air freedom of a convertible, all at a remarkable value.

Redesigned and re-engineered for 2011, the Chrysler 200 Convertible is unique in the standard specialty segment as a true mid-sized convertible that comfortably seats four adults and has ample room in the trunk, even when the power top is dropped.

Consumers can choose from two automatically latching tops, a body-color painted steel, retractable hard top, or a cloth soft top, both of which can drop with the press of a button on the key fob.

With a new exterior design, refined ride and handling characteristics complements of an upgraded suspension, an efficient new powertrain, safety features that are all standard on every model, and a beautifully crafted all-new interior, the 200 Convertible stands alone in the segment for customers who crave the

wind in their hair and sun on their face.

The all-new interior for 2011 allows customers to step into a level of craftsmanship, content and comfort that is world-class.

Innovative features including an available media center with voice command that is easy to use and offers SIRIUS Satellite Radio, a 30-gigabyte-HDD/CD/DVD/MP3 radio with SIRIUS Travel Link, which provides real-time information, keep drivers and passengers connected and make the drive something to look forward to.

The 2011 Chrysler 200 Convertible provides drivers a fun, confident, handling performance in all driving situations, whether it's commuting to work or a weekend adventure on scenic roads. Virtually every part of the suspension has been retuned or redesigned for 2011, including 22 of 28 suspension bushings.

A new and improved powertrain lineup also contributes to the new 200 Convertible's driving experience.

The 2011 Chrysler 200 Convertible is offered with the available new 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 engine which provides an exhilarating driving experience that offers customers the best of both worlds — outstanding V-6 horsepower and exceptional fuel economy.

The 200 convertible is also available with the proven 2.4-liter I4 World Gas Engine. Both engines are mated to a six-speed transmission.