

Former GM Design Exec Now Prospers in France

by Gerald Scott
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One of the great joys in the auto industry these days is having an engaging conversation over breakfast with Anne Asensio, former GM design senior executive who is now vice president of Design Experience at Dassault Systemes, the French high-end software design and development firm.

In conversation, Asensio is an interesting mix of European and American design thought - she has a BA in Transportation Design from Detroit-based College for Creative Studies (CCS), as well as a Master of Arts plus a degree in technical sciences / industrial design from Paris-based Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Appliqués.

She is a well-travelled and well-spoken auto executive, freely discussing everything from cloud computing and corporate coaching replacing top-down management in the U.S., to wikinomics, to how social networking continues to impact the liberation movement in Libya and elsewhere in the Middle East.

As a design expert, she offered a theory on why GM cars to a greater degree, and Ford and Chrysler cars to a lesser degree, were all largely criticized in the 1990s for "looking alike," with little brand character and little distinction that said to the customer "drive me!"

Here's her theory, one you've probably never heard before, but the 1980s - 1990s were when the Big Three were adopting Japanese business practices pretty much wholesale; kaizen, just-in-time parts delivery, quality circles and all of that.

While Big Three quality and J.D. Power scores starting rising at that time, perhaps what was lost was design passion and brand character, as those building blocks got folded into the new "team - team - team" work ethic like everything else in Detroit in the 1990s. (Indeed, in retrospect, it did feel like Big Three and particularly GM passenger cars in the 1990s were all designed "by committee," which is to say bland or safe).

"Remember the Japanese Way, the Toyota Way?" she asked.

Also, the Big Three hired almost exclusively from traditional domestic car and transportation design schools, as opposed to Europe's habit of hiring a broad range of talent from architects and sculptors to painters and landscape artists and then let them have select input on car design.

Asensio expounds on this topic as follows:

"Depending on the period of time, there are particular reasons why a particular area of the world is quite dynamic about design," she suggested.



Anne Asensio

"(Back in the) 1990s. . . in Europe, they don't have 'official education' for car design, automotive design was not a particular domain that you'd specialize in.

"Most of the designers in Europe graduate from architecture, fine art, product design or industrial design at large, where they were busy learning their methodology but in a much broader and holistic way. Then they discover along the way that they can design cars as well.

"I think it did help in some ways to have a less homogeneous and systematic way of doing cars in those periods - because those people are coming from the art field, but they are very different and from a different background. When I was at Renault, there was a lot of creativity and a lot of 'interdisciplinarity' (on the Design staff there).

"I truly believe that the creativity really depends on the intensity of the differences that you can bring in terms of response, instead of just a nice, seamless, flow-less education (inculcated in U.S. design schools) that makes people always do things the same way.

"Most of the elite comes from the same 'place,' and they get very comfortable in hiring people who think like them. . . then you start to see the effects on the product: the product looks alike because whether you're at Chrysler, Ford or GM, if you all studied in the same school, you're probably going to be following the same kind of path. It's one of the explanations I can see between Europe (and the U.S.) and definitely back then."

Prior to her appointment with Dassault Systemes, Asensio worked as executive director of Design, Advanced Design, at the General Motors Design Center, also in charge of vehicle design at GM's Michigan, Los Angeles and U.K. design studios.

She led the development of a number recent GM auto show concepts including the Cadillac Sixteen and the Hummer H3T - her latest effort being the concept version of the Chevrolet Volt, which debuted to raves at the 2007 Detroit auto show.

THINK City Car Partners with General Electric

DEARBORN - THINK is hitting the road with GE and other electric vehicle makers for a seven-city electric vehicle experience tour. The event will feature test drives of the THINK City for local business fleet operators, government representatives and other EV stakeholders, along with educational workshops with GE's EV experts. The tour is designed to help local communities understand the technical and business impacts of the coming wide-spread deployment of EVs in the U.S.

Scheduled tour dates are: San Francisco, March 10; Seattle, March 15; Los Angeles, March 17; San Diego, March 22. Additional spring 2011 EV experience tour dates will be announced later for Austin, New York City, and Washington, D.C.

"We are excited to be a part of this unique and important educational event that GE is hosting," said THINK spokesperson Brendan Prebo. "We're looking forward to giving hundreds of fleet managers and operators the experience of driving and learning more about the THINK City."

GE owns one of the world's largest vehicle fleets and operates a leading global fleet management business. The company has committed to purchasing 25,000 Evs by 2015

for its own fleet and for fleet customers.

With millions of vehicles in operation, the nation's fleets are expected to play an important role in accelerating vehicle electrification in the U.S. Fleet sales will drive up vehicle and battery production volumes and drive down costs, which will benefit retail consumers. This will help push the industry past early adopters into mainstream consumer markets.

Unlike individual consumers, fleets focus more on the total cost of ownership, which is significantly lower for EVs, and not just the up-front cost of the vehicle. Fleets also tend to have highly predictable driving routes and centralized refuelling, which when combined with substantially discounted electricity rates make them a natural platform to launch this new industry.

THINK is currently selling the THINK City to fleet customers in select markets in the U.S. and plans to roll out retail sales later this year.

The THINK City is an all-electric, zero-emission car designed for fleet applications and urban commuters. Durable, highly maneuverable and with low maintenance, the THINK City can travel 100 miles on a single charge, using advanced lithium-

ion batteries manufactured in Indiana by Ener1, Inc. The vehicle has accumulated more than 35 million road miles in customer experience since it was first safety certified in Europe in 1999.

THINK is the world's leading dedicated electric vehicle manufacturer, developed and proven over 20 years. This heritage gives THINK a head start with having put nearly 10,000 electric vehicles on the road and accumulated more than 35 million road miles of customer experience.

The THINK City, the first electric car to be granted pan-European regulatory safety ap-

proval, is sold across Europe, with sales and production in the U.S. and operations being developed in Asia.

THINK is also a leader in electric drive train technology, and was the first to offer a modular and flexible electric drive-train solution in the business-to-business sector. With its Scandinavian origins and sustainability mindset, THINK is one of the most carbon-efficient car companies in the world.

THINK is among the rash of smaller but influential EV car-makers that have popped up, even as the OEMs try to lay claim this new technology.

Ford High School Charity Program Hits Milestone

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"I have been in dealership management for over 30 years and I have never seen a program that successfully promotes all the great things going on at Ford and the dealership, while also giving our communities around the country a much needed helping hand."

"With all the cutbacks in school programs, Ford is to be congratulated for this," said Ed

Avansino, a test drive participant at a 2010 event conducted at Carson High School in Carson, City, Nevada.

The 2011 Drive One 4 UR School program kicks off its spring tour in March and runs through June. The program starts up again in the fall, with events taking place from August through November.

The Ford Drive One 4 UR School program often appears at charity events, too.



U.S. classic cars are an increasingly common sight in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). SEMA representatives pose here with UAE government officials, the U.S. Consul General and local specialty equipment distributors officials around a 1932 Ford with a Chevrolet engine.

SEMA Works with United Arab Emirates on Autos

DIAMOND BAR, Calif. - Officials with the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) have signed a memo of understanding with SEMA that recognizes the growing importance of the specialty equipment market in the United Arab Emirates.

"SEMA has a tradition of bringing government and industry together to promote the legitimate growth of the marketplace"

"ESMA considers the signing of this MoU with SEMA as the starting point for the mu-

tual cooperation between ESMA and SEMA," said Mr. Badri, ESMA Director General.

The purpose of this MoU is to establish a formal exchange of information between ESMA and SEMA to establish an ongoing dialogue as the UAE government seeks to develop a legal framework to support its fledgling specialty equipment market.

"Based on this MoU, SEMA could help ESMA and other related parties in UAE, nominated by ESMA, by transferring its long experience in the

specialty equipment market to UAE, providing the advice and technical support, conducting joint training courses and workshops in this field," Mr. Badri added.

"There is also an opportunity for SEMA to help respond to ESMA's requests for market data, information on trends and anticipated developments worldwide, which will also allow ESMA to benefit from SEMA's educational services. Specific areas that will benefit ESMA include information about trademarks, patents and copyrights, links to portals of useful information, and updates on all relevant legislative issues that arise."

"SEMA has a tradition of bringing government and industry together to promote the legitimate growth of the marketplace," said Linda Spencer, Director of International and Government Relations for SEMA. "This is an important step in creating harmony between business and regulators. We applaud ESMA in this forward looking effort," she added.

In the coming months ESMA and SEMA will collaborate on educational programs and support services for stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the customization industry. The goal is to create a regulatory framework that will lead to heightened safety and environmental solutions by engaging business and government.

"Specialty equipment products are an important element of our business here in the Emirates," said Mitch Perera, Sales and Marketing Manager of Liberty Motorsports. "This work is addressing our business and the interests of our customers."

By virtue of the Federal Law No. 28 of 2001, the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) mandated as the authorized government agency responsible for the development of na-

tional standards.

Such authority is given for the purpose of providing safety and health, economic and environmental protection, by ensuring that services, consumer products and other materials are safe, of high quality and in conformity with relevant Standards.

SEMA, the Specialty Equipment Market Association founded in 1963, represents the \$29 billion specialty automotive industry of 6,461 member-companies. It is the authoritative source for research, data, trends and market growth information for the specialty auto parts industry. The industry provides appearance, performance, comfort, convenience and technology products for passenger and recreational vehicles.

TRW Develops Tire Pressure Monitor Unit 'Zero Initiator'

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system started mass production in late 2010 and is being evaluated by a number of global manufacturers. Additional vehicles will launch in 2011 equipped with this state of the art technology.

With 2009 sales of \$11.6 billion, TRW Automotive ranks among the world's leading automotive suppliers. Headquartered in Livonia, Michigan, USA, the Company, through its subsidiaries, operates in 26 countries and employs over 60,000 people worldwide. TRW Automotive products include integrated vehicle control and driver assist systems, braking systems, steering systems, suspension systems, occupant safety systems (seat belts and airbags), electronics, engine components, fastening systems and aftermarket replacement parts and services.

Chrysler CEO Travels to Mexico for Fiat 500 Kickoff

MEXICO CITY - Together with Mexico's President Felipe Calderon, Chrysler Group CEO Sergio Marchionne celebrated the launch of the all-new 2012 Fiat 500 last week at Los Pinos, the official residence and office of Mexico's President.

Marchionne, President Calderon, Governor of the State of Mexico Enrique Peña, and Chrysler de Mexico President and CEO Joe ChamaSrouer joined other local officials and employees from the Toluca Assembly Plant where the Fiat 500 is built to recognize the importance of the plant, the workforce and the all-new vehicle in the future success of the Company.

The Fiat 500 is one of 16 all-new or significantly refreshed vehicles and one of two new nameplates Chrysler Group launched in 2010.

"A little more than a year ago, I promised President Calderon that I would be back to celebrate the launch of the Fiat 500 and I am pleased that I could keep that promise today," said Marchionne.

"With the assistance of the Mexican government, we have been able to prepare the Toluca Assembly Plant for production of the first Fiat, a vehicle that demonstrates the level of cooperation between our two companies and reintroduces the brand to the North Ameri-

can market after more than 28 years."

Marchionne announced in February 2010 that the company would invest \$550 million USD, with the assistance of loans from the Mexican government, to build the new Fiat model in its Toluca plant. With that investment, Chrysler Group added 622 jobs to support production. The plant will build more than 120,000 vehicles for export to the United States, Canada, and South America, as well as to China by the third quarter of 2011.

"Fiat 500 production here is an important landmark because it reaffirms Chrysler's commitment to Mexico that dates back to 1938," said Marchionne.

"Mexico is in an ideal position for production of this car. Because of its free-trade agreements with neighbors to both the north and south, it is a bridge between NAFTA and Latin America.

"And for the Mexican market, where the 500 has already been sold for several years, this marks an important shift from a vehicle imported from Europe to one that is built locally," said Marchionne.

Today, Chrysler has nearly 7,000 employees and six plants in Mexico, among which the Company builds Ram trucks

and the all-new 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 engine in Saltillo, as well as stamping operations.

In addition, Chrysler de Mexico has been overseeing distribution of the Fiat brand in the country since October 2010.

In addition to the \$550 million investment in Toluca, Chrysler Group has invested

more than \$3 billion USD in its U.S. and Canadian facilities and has made significant progress toward building a successful enterprise since June 2009.

Separately, the first Fiat dealerships in the U.S. - called studios - have begun selling the car, with the first Fiat 500 officially sold in Maryland.



Employees at Chrysler Group LLC's Toluca (Mexico) Assembly Plant install the sunroof on the all-new Fiat 500. The Toluca facility has been building various Chrysler vehicles for domestic and export markets for more than 40 years. The plant began producing the Fiat 500 in December 2010.