

Volt Is Not a Political Punching Bag – GM’s Akerson

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

GM Chairman and CEO Dan Akerson, no shrinking violet, he, went to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., last week to defend the Chevrolet Volt.

The timing of Akerson’s testimony was nothing if not interesting because a few days prior to his Jan. 25 visit in front of the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight and Government Spending, NHTSA closed the book on its earlier Volt safety investigation.

NHTSA, of course, opened an investigation into the Volt’s safety regarding the lithium-ion battery pack last fall, a good three months after an odd post-crash incident in which a Volt caught fire three weeks following the test.

In the meantime, NHTSA and GM engineers came up with a make-good solution to

better defend the line between the battery and battery coolant system, which is where engineers figure any possible trouble came from to begin with.

Akerson was blunt in his observations.

“We engineered Volt to show the world what great vehicles we make at General Motors,” Akerson said.

“Unfortunately, there is one thing we did not engineer. Although we loaded the Volt with state-of-the-art safety features – we did not engineer the Volt to be a political punching bag.

“And that, sadly, is what it’s become.

“For all of the loose talk about fires, we are here today because tests by regulators resulted in battery fires under lab conditions that no driver would experience in the real world.

“In fact, Volt customers

have driven over 25 million miles without a single, similar incident.

“In one test, the fire occurred seven days after a simulated crash. In another, it took three weeks after the test. Not three minutes. Not three hours. Not three days. Three weeks.

“Based on those test results, did we think there was an imminent safety risk? No.

“Or, as one of our customers put it: if they couldn’t cut him out of the vehicle in two or three weeks, he had a bigger problem to worry about.”

The Volt was developed on a 29-month schedule between its debut at the January 2007 Detroit auto show and its product launch in December of 2010 as a 2011 model.

Volt went on to win numerous trade industry awards including 2011 North American Car of the Year.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

GM put the Chevrolet Volt “on a pedestal,” so to speak, at 12 Mile and Mound, a full two weeks before NHTSA coincidentally closed its case on the Volt’s so-called battery fire safety issue.

In the almost 14 months that the vehicle has been on the market, GM has sold

about 8,000 or more Volts to the general public.

The Chevrolet Volt is exclu-

sively manufactured at the GM Hamtramck Assembly Center.

Former Army Budget Director Says TACOM Should Be Okay After Cuts

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

A Washington insider came calling last week to speak to the local chapter of AUSA – the nonprofit association for the U.S. Army – and his audience really was all ears.

That’s because Lt. Gen. Roger G. Thompson, Jr. (Ret.), is also a national leader of AUSA as vice president of Membership & Meetings, and he came to address the annual AUSA breakfast at Macomb College in Warren.

Thompson is a retired general who served the Army during his active years with the 1st Armored Division, 82nd Airborne, 3d Infantry Division and VII Corps Headquarters.

His last active position was as director of the Army Budget, so with Thompson speaking a week prior to the Pentagon’s formal announcement of huge budget cuts coming out of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Warren AUSA audience – the chapter is called The Arsenal of Democracy – listened carefully.

“This association is watching very, very closely and has already spoken out about not making the soldier and soldier’s family a target in all of this,” Thompson said in his formal remarks.

“The last thing this country ought to be doing is targeting these folks who’ve given so much for our country. Medical benefits, pay, housing (are all at risk), so we’re going to be there for strong support



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Maj. Gen. Kurt Stein of TACOM, center, loads up on some vittles at the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA) breakfast at Macomb College, where the guest speaker discussed future Army budgets.

for a well-thought-out national strategy.”

Thompson’s remarks were addressed to pending cuts being faced by the Department of the Army, but of course the entire Defense Department and Pentagon structure are looking at massive cuts following the two overseas wars, one that ended recently and one (Afghanistan) that is still winding down.

The AUSA audience included a number of uniformed troops from the U.S. Army’s Detroit Arsenal base in Warren, led by Maj. Gen. Kurt Stein, the senior officer for TACOM Lifecycle Management Command.

The TACOM and TARDEC officers and executives were there to get a bead on changes that they might be facing as both the Army and

the Pentagon endure what looks like some very painful cutbacks, adjustments and changes.

Still, the 6,000 people who work at the local Arsenal – most are civilian employees of the Defense Department – should be relatively safe, according to Thompson, who discussed the issue during Q&A following his talk.

Said Thompson, “(TACOM - TARDEC staff) are very important people. I don’t see that anybody in their right mind would want to gut this and make it no longer effective. I can’t say what the Army is thinking about . . . but I would say that the Army values greatly all that has been done here. (TACOM) is a valuable asset and it’s hard to rebuild it if it goes away as everybody around here knows.”



Chrysler Group WCM Academy Lead Scott Tolmie, left, Chrysler Group Senior Vice President of Manufacturing and WCM Scott Garberding, Warren Mayor Jim Fouts, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, UAW Chrysler Department Vice President General Holiefield and Chrysler Group Head of WCM Massimo Risi cut the ribbon to officially open a Chrysler Group academy in Warren.

Chrysler Opens Academy for Employees

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

Chrysler further endorsed the World Class Manufacturing (WCM) philosophy that it has borrowed from partner Fiat by opening a big new training facility in Warren dedicated to WCM education and development.

The automaker took a portion of its UAW-Chrysler Technology Training Center on 9 Mile Road, east of Dequindre in Warren, and turned it into the state-of-the-art World Class Manufacturing Academy.

It looks more like a bright new Apple retail store than it does auto-industrial training, but perhaps that’s the point these days.

“When Chrysler was developing its survival plan in partnership with Fiat in 2009, one of the key elements of turning the company around was the implementation of World Class Manufacturing,” said Scott Garberding, Chrysler’s senior vice president of Manufacturing.

“Now, after two-and-a-half years, our Chrysler Group manufacturing facilities are some of the most productive and efficient in the industry, and several are positioned to receive Bronze status, a significant milestone on the WCM journey, within the next six months.”

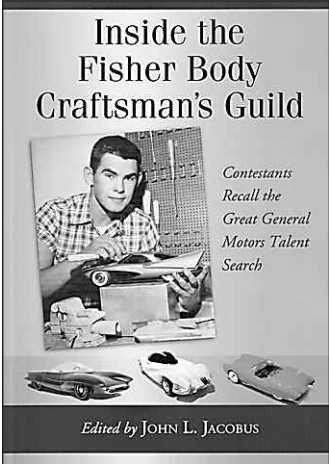
Occupying about 25,000 square feet of the UAW-Chrysler Technology Training Center, the new academy’s

mission is to transfer WCM “know-how” to more than 1,200 participants each year and cultivate what Chrysler describes as an enriched culture of continuous improvement and learning.

Another 1,300 will visit the academy annually for tours and meetings, the automaker estimates.

Added VP Garberding, “The results that have been achieved in our plants could not have been realized without the support of our UAW partners.

“From the leadership to the shop floor, everyone has become an advocate of WCM and understands that it’s critical to maintaining Chrysler Group’s competitiveness in the future.”



GM Tech Center retiree John Jacobus has written the second in a series of books on a design competition for youth.

This follow-up book gives 29 contestants room to describe how the competition came to impact their careers – most became professional car designers because they were inspired by the Fisher Body contest, they collectively say.

Writes Jacobus in the introduction, “In the 29 essays that make up this book, contest-

Ex-GM Engineer’s Book Speaks of Talent Search

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

The second in a series of books edited by John Jacobus about the Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild scale-model car design competition has been published – and what a rich part of GM Design and Fisher Body history it celebrates.

Titled, “Inside the Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild: Contestants Recall the Great General Motors Talent Search,” the book is the second in a series examining the national youth design competition – one that would eventually produce a host of professional designers, including Chuck Jordan of GM and Virgil Exner, Jr., at Ford.

It seems that from 1930 to 1968, General Motors sponsored a national 1:12-scale model automobile design competition for youth – the

famous Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild.

According to the Jacobus book, each year, thousands of boys and young men from across America competed for scholarships by designing, building and submitting a scale model of their own “dream car,” to be judged on such qualities as design originality and craftsmanship.

The book also notes, “A public relations bonanza for GM, the program helped to identify and nurture a generation of future leaders in design engineering, automotive design, automotive styling, industrial design and other endeavors.”

Jacobus, the editor, is a retired auto safety engineer who today works as a technical writer and safety management consultant in Maryland.

The first book was an overall history of the program.



Scale-model-car competition entries are gathered at the Fisher Body auditorium at the GM Tech Center in Warren in the early 1960s.

ants in General Motors’ Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild model car competitions discuss their experiences, trials and tribulations, and techniques as they vied for college scholarships between 1947 and 1968.

In the intro, Jacobus points out, “They vividly remember all facets of competing in this high-profile event during the

critical adolescent years of their lives: the knowledge required, the strategic planning they had to do, the technical problems and hurdles they encountered, the price exacted . . . moments of crisis (and much more).”

The author goes on to say that the Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild was an extracurricular industrial arts pro-

gram in which thousands of boys and young men (15 percent were college age, and back then, only males could compete) from across the country submitted their 1/12th-scale, “scratch-built” dream car models on an annual basis.

Jacobus writes, “A guild for

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