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Shirley Muldowney

Muldowney Set For Woodward Dream Cruise

FERNDALE – Shirley Muldowney will be signing autographs in the Michigan Gumball Rally area of the 2012 Ferndale Woodward Dream Cruise.

The Michigan Gumball Rally is an annual statewide road trip involving 100-plus participating vehicles, traveling on more than 1,000 miles of Michigan highways. The convoy stops at Michigan landmarks, museums and race tracks during the weekend before the official Woodward Dream Cruise.

Meanwhile, some 31 years ago, Shirley Muldowney became one of the sport's great race drivers to win at the March Meet, one of the most traditional and oldest racing events in history.

The following year, Shirley made it to the finals at The March Meet only to lose to Lucille Lee – an all-woman final, which was a first.

There were many women who broke barriers in motorsports, but none were as huge as Shirley Muldowney, who was the first drag racer to win three Top Fuel NHRA Championships.

Muldowney was voted in the Top 5 All-time Great Drag Racers, a tribute to her tenacity as well as her talent and business acumen.

Her memorabilia is still as popular as ever.

Shirley Muldowney was inducted into the Motorsports Hall Of Fame in 1990.

Before she became famous with her Top Fueler, she drove a Funny Car very successfully.

She was already famous enough that, by the early 1980s, a movie was made about her called, "Heart Like A Wheel," with a great performance by and starring Bonnie Bedelia in 1983.

A year later, Shirley would have a hellacious race crash in Montreal that broke several bones in her body and put her out of the sport for a couple of years.

Muldowney now comes full circle, being the pre-eminent motorsports celebrity who will be visiting the 2012 Woodward Dream Cruise.

Note that the Woodward Dream Cruise is now in its 18th year, having started back in 1995 as a regional event, but it quickly grew into the juggernaut auto event that it is today.



Shirley Muldowney in 1973.

Model Maker to Parachute 70 Times in a Day

By Gerald Scott

GM metal model maker Larry Ekstrom, who works at the Tech Center in Warren, will be jumping out of an airplane 70 times in one day.

We're not making this up and you read that right.

Ekstrom will be skydiving and his plane and pilot will be taking off and landing 70 times, all in one day, Aug. 10, to celebrate Ekstrom's 70th birthday.

Of his Tech Center work, Ekstrom said, "I'm modifying a trunk linkage for new models, a 2015 SUV."

Skydiving is a lifelong passion of Ekstrom's.

But that's not all – this is a charitable stunt to benefit the local chapter of Leader Dogs for the Blind. Ekstrom will raise money through individual sponsorships of his jumps (a buck per jump yields \$70 for charity, like that), sales of T-shirts and more.

Ekstrom, by the way, is a veteran of more than 13,000 sport skydiving jumps since 1967, so probably don't worry about the safety built into his "70 for 70" – 70 parachute jumps to mark his 70th birthday that is, on Aug. 10.

"I did '60 for 60' for MS ten years ago, we raised \$6,000 for them," Ekstrom pointed out. "Last time we did it, people were donating per jump and didn't think I'd make it. So they'd give a buck or two per jump and when I did 60, they had to give a little more than they thought they were going to."

Ekstrom will be jumping from a small airport along 29

Mile and Romeo Plank Road in Macomb County's Ray community.

"I'll start Friday morning about 9 a.m. The last time, when I did 60, I was landing

every four minutes, so it was 7 hours, 20 minutes," Ekstrom said.

Asked if he wouldn't otherwise get disoriented on about the, say, 56th jump, Ekstrom

laughed and replied, "Nah, I've been doing it too long."

"Right now I'm at 13,392 jumps."

The photographs accompanying Ekstrom's activities are

quite dramatic – if you've never skydived before, has he ever got an adventure for you. Ekstrom does tandem jumps,

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UAW-GM's Larry Ekstrom will dive on his 70th birthday later this week, to raise money for Leader Dogs for the Blind.

Agriculture Sec'y Visits Ford Lab

On Monday, Aug. 6, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will join U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow at Ford Motor Co.'s Dearborn laboratory to discuss Michigan leadership and statewide economic growth in the bio-based manufacturing industry.

Mixed Bag for Big 3 as July Sales Seesaw Among GM, Ford, Chrysler

By Gerald Scott

A confluence of factors contributed to the July new car sales reports that showed two of the Big Three automakers slipped while Chrysler excelled.

That is to say, Chrysler sales for the month were up 13 percent year over year while GM sales fell 6 percent and Ford dropped 4 percent.

Among the factors influencing those numbers is the re-emergence of the Japanese automakers in the American market. Honda's sales were up 45 percent and Toyota sales jumped 26 percent. This resurgence, of course, came at the expense of the Big Three carmakers in Detroit.

"Toyota and Honda have regained all of the share they lost, and much faster than we thought they would," Jesse Toprak, vice president of market intelligence for the car buying site TrueCar.com, told the Associated Press.

"Their customers appear to be a lot more loyal than we gave them credit for."

Indeed, for the past 18 months, the Japanese automakers appeared to be impacted by the tsunami in Japan, as well as Toyota dealing with the ongoing effects of its sudden acceleration car recall issues.

That chapter may have ended as the Asian imports re-established themselves in the U.S. in a notable way.

Meanwhile, Chrysler continues going great guns by reporting that 13 percent jump in sales – it moved 126,000 cars and trucks, its best July in five years.

Good deals on last year's models, low- or no-interest financing and strong trade-in values due to high used-car prices all helped sales in July, according to the AP.

And Alec Gutierrez, senior market analyst at Kelley Blue Book, had the following take on July's numbers:

"With some one- and two-year-old used vehicles commanding as much as 90 percent of original MSRP, many consumers have opted to purchase a new vehicle rather

than used. In some cases, a new vehicle actually is a more affordable proposition than an equivalent one- or two-year-old model, due to more attractive finance offers and lease opportunities for new vehicles," KBB's Gutierrez observed.

"This phenomenon likely only will last through the end of the year. In fact, used-vehicle values declined 2.3 percent in July alone, and currently they are down close to 6 percent year-over-year."

"As used-vehicle supply improves in 2013, Kelley Blue Book expects to see the gap between late-model used vehicles and new-car transaction prices widen. This should prompt many buyers to look to used cars as a viable replacement, putting an additional burden on manufacturers to rely on incentives to make up for potentially reduced demand next year."

Sales numbers matter – lest we forget, July was also the month that GM marketing chief Joel Ewanick had to fall on his sword, so to speak.



Chrysler has launched "Wings," a new co-branded TV commercial.

Chrysler to Dip Its Toe In Sci-Fi Movie Culture

AUBURN HILLS – The Chrysler brand has launched a new co-branded TV commercial for the Chrysler 200 Convertible as part of a multi-tiered partnership with "Total Recall," the highly anticipated action thriller that debuted in theaters nationwide Aug. 3.

Futuristic Chrysler- and Dodge-branded hovercraft vehicles will appear in the film.

As the fast-paced TV spot demonstrates, the Chrysler winged logo is more than just a badge, it is a commitment to give drivers wings.

The ad, titled, "Wings," sets out to show how the driving excitement that the Chrysler hovercars provided in "Total Recall" in the year 2084 is the same that can be experienced today behind the wheel of a 2012 Chrysler 200 Convertible.

This parallel is clearly visible when both the branded "hero" hovercraft and the Chrysler 200 Convertible effortlessly dance through an urban environment, only to merge into one at the end.

The voiceover says, "The year 2084 is a long time to wait for an exciting driving experience. We don't put wings on our cars just so you can keep up with today, the future is here and the sky is the limit... the 2012 Chrysler 200 Convertible in dealerships today, 'Total Recall' in theaters Aug. 3."

The spot was created by Los Angeles-based Mandrake/Rogue Agent in partnership with the Detroit-

based Doner agency. A similar spot featuring the Chrysler 300 will be created internationally for the international

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HF35 Hybrid Brings New Life to Ford Van Dyke Site

By Gerald Scott

Ford Van Dyke Transmission launched a new era of clean tech and job growth with the debut of a flexible assembly line that includes the production of front-wheel-drive hybrid transmissions.

The HF35 hybrid transmission being built at the Van Dyke plant will supply a half-dozen or more of Ford's current and future hybrid and EV passenger car lineup with the ultra-modern tranny.

This has both external community significance as well as importance inside Ford's manufacturing arena.

Just think – now the Chevy Volt at the GM Tech Center, the Chrysler 200 car at SHAP and also the HF35 Ford transmission are all built along Van Dyke Avenue in the heart of Macomb County's main manufacturing corridor.

And, of course, the new HF35 line elevates Van Dyke Transmission from perhaps an also-ran into one of the most modern and flexible assembly plants in the world, much less metro Detroit.

Indeed, Ford and its suppliers have invested \$220 million to transform Van Dyke Trans-

mission into a modern operation capable of producing Ford's new hybrid transmission as well as other fuel-efficient transmissions.

The investments are part of

an overall \$632 million commitment Ford and its suppliers are making to increase capacity and flexibility at three North American transmission facilities by 2015.

"Our investments in Van Dyke Transmission make it our most advanced, efficient transmission plant in the

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Jim Tetrault, Ford North America Manufacturing vice president, at Van Dyke Transmission.