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"FIRST IN THE HEART OF DETROIT SINCE 1933" NEW CENTER NEWS

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Encore Targets – Young, Conquest Buyers

by Jim Stickford

2012 was a great year for Buick and company officials believe with the launch of the 2013 Encore this year will be even better.

At a special test drive and press conference in Birmingham, Buick officials showed off the new Encore to the media.

Tony DiSalle, vice president of Buick Marketing, told reporters that over the past five years the Buick brand has done some things that are difficult for auto companies.

Chief among these accomplishments is to decrease the average age of the brand's buyer. In the last five years, that age has gone from 64 years of age to 57, DiSalle said.

Another accomplishment is cultivating what DiSalle called the "conquest" buyer. That's a buyer who purchased a Buick and whose previous vehicle was not a GM product. The company is able to keep track of this based on buyer trade-ins. In 2007, conquests accounted for 28 percent of Buick sales. That number is now 44 percent, with the Verano, DiSalle said, being the brand's conquest champion.

"We anticipate the Encore doing well also," DiSalle said. "This all started with the Enclave. It's the first vehicle in the new Buick portfolio to cycle through a prod-

uct life span. In November of 2012, 40 percent of Enclave buyers were loyalists. December was the best month for Enclave sales ever. I also want to say that the LaCrosse is doing very well even in the fifth year of its product cycle."

And the Verano, DiSalle said, is doing very well as well, with more than 50 percent of its sales being conquest sales.

Jim Danahy, chief engineer for the Buick Encore, said the vehicle, which just hit the first show-

room floors on Jan. 17, is being produced in South Korea. It uses GM's global small crossover platform. A version of the vehicle is sold in Europe as the Opel Mokka.

Fuel economy is of course important these days and the Encore gets good mileage, Danahy said. Its front-wheel drive numbers are 33 mpg on the highway, combined mileage is 28 mpg. The all-wheel drive version gets 30 mpg highway, 26 mpg combined.

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2013 Buick Encore

Chrysler's Refurbished Conner Ave. Plant Prepares for Launch of the Next-Generation SRT Viper

After nearly two years in hibernation, Chrysler's Conner Avenue Assembly Plant in Detroit is rumbling to life as it opens its doors to produce the next-generation SRT Viper.

"With no plans for the future, Conner Avenue was on life support when it closed in the summer of 2010," said Doug Gouin, head of Viper Operations.

"Now, with a transfusion of passion, determination, world-class manufacturing and an all-new vehicle, the plant has been revived. You can feel the energy and excitement about what is happening inside when you walk through the door."

With the decision made to reopen Conner, Chrysler began in the fall of 2011 to implement world-class manufacturing, Fiat's production system that Chrysler adopted when the two companies joined forces in June 2009.

As part of the journey, every inch of the nearly 400,000-square-foot facility has been refurbished and improved, including the lobby – where a historical Viper timeline now hangs – to the 14 restrooms, to the shop floor, which is now hospital-clean, bright and more organized to increase the efficiency of each operation.

"Our goal is to be the best manufacturing plant within the Chrysler Group in the fastest time," said Gouin, who can make such a bold statement because he's already seen rapid change taking place at Conner.

"A year ago, Conner had the worst score in the company on an I.T. audit. At the next audit, after 12 months of focused attention and sheer determination, Conner scored 94 percent, the highest score in the company. This is the kind of progress I expect to see throughout the plant as we move forward."

With all of the improvements, the Conner Avenue Assembly Plant now looks like a modern, state-of-the-art facility, even though it bows to its coach builder philosophy.

The plant still maintains the handcrafted build process for the Viper as when it began production in 1992.

Once the plant idled, all of the employees were redeployed to other Chrysler Group facilities, but hoped that they would have the chance to return to their home plant. About 60 of them jumped at the chance when the opportunity arose.

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Ford Atlas Provides Glimpse of Pickup Future

by Ken Brown

Against the spectacular backdrop of a simulated active building/construction site on a stage in Joe Louis Arena during the 2013 North American International Auto Show, Ford Motor Company unveiled the Atlas Concept as "the future vision for pickup trucks."

The Ford Atlas Concept showcases an array of design, engineering and technology innovations aimed at advances in fuel economy and enhancements in vehicle functionality. Its 238-inch overall length, 150-inch wheel-

base and overall "tough" appearance are all similar to the current Ford F-150.

Nevertheless, Ford has not confirmed speculation that the Atlas Concept is actually a precursor for the next-generation F-series pickup truck that is due in the market in late-2014 as a 2015 model. Instead, the company emphasizes that Atlas is a concept that focuses on what developments to anticipate in future pickup truck feature and equipment offerings.

"The Ford Atlas Concept previews the innovations that will transform what people expect

from their pickup," said Raj Nair, Ford group vice president, Global Product Development.

A key contributor to the Ford Atlas Concept's fuel economy advantage is its next-generation EcoBoost powertrain, which features truck-enhanced Auto Start-Stop engine shut-off technology. As well as shutting off the engine to save fuel when the truck is stopped in traffic, this system "knows" when it's time to temporarily suspend the feature, which is whenever the truck "knows" it is towing a load.

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2014 Ford Atlas concept

Grand Cherokee, Dart Draw Show Visitors

by Darrett Pullins

Well over 210,000 braved the coldest weather of the year to visit the North American International Auto Show its opening weekend at Cobo Hall. Crowds rushed into Cobo on Sunday at the 9am opening, to view the latest and greatest that the automobile manufacturers had to offer. There were a myriad of displays from manufacturers from all around the world, but it seemed that crowds were very interested in the cars from the U.S. manufacturers. By watching the amount of people visiting the Chrysler area, it was clear that two Auto Show favorites from that manufacturer were the Grand Cherokee and Dodge Dart.

The Jeep Grand Cherokee was one of the stars of the Chrysler lineup. Sporting some changes both interior and exterior from last year's model, the 2013 Grand Cherokee was a great source of pride for one of the assembly line

workers who helps to build this four-wheeled beauty. William Stoffel, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, works at the Jefferson Avenue assembly plant. He came to the show with family and friends to admire and take pride in the product that he helps to produce.

Stoffel was a great source of knowledge regarding this redesigned product from Chrysler, and it's apparent that knowledge comes from the excitement of being part of producing a great product. One of the elements of the redesign he seemed to be most proud of was the new front end that helps to increase the air intake area for better engine cooling. Also, the new LED headlights were a new feature he was quick to point out, saying the LEDs were brighter than conventional headlights and are designed to last for the life of the vehicle. Stoffel was also extremely proud of the redesigns around the engine compartment which

allow the driver easier access to the fuse box.

One of the other autos in the Dodge display area that attracted a lot of attention was the Dodge Dart. Many auto show attendees spent lots of time getting in and out of the different Dart vehicles on the floor, from the ST placed at the entry point to checking out the plush interior of the SXT model, and scoping out each vehicle's bells and whistles. The real attention grabber, however, was the future Dart GT.

The bright red car was a stand out in the Chrysler display. The new Dart GT will feature a 184 hp 2.4-liter Tigershark MultiAir 2 engine with six-speed manual, or available six-speed PowerTech automatic Auto Stick. Although the GT is not currently available, Erin W., product specialist, narrating the specifications of the future model, told many in the crowd that the car would be available in the second half of the second quarter of 2013.



William Stoffel stands in front of the Jeep Grand Cherokee at Cobo Hall.

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