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GM's Ferguson - 'Cadillac is Back'

Cadillac's year-to-date sales increase of 38 percent will be the brand's largest yearly increase since 1976, making the 110-year-old brand the fastest-growing major automotive brand in the U.S., according to Cadillac officials.

The brand's news for May 2013 was more of the same, with sales up 40 percent compared with May of 2012.

Cadillac's May increase of 40 percent marks its 12th consecutive month of sales growth.

"Cadillac is back," said Bob Ferguson, vice president, Global

Cadillac. "Our growth is product-driven, new luxury vehicles with dramatic design and performance drawing new customers to showrooms."

Total Cadillac sales for May 2013 was 13,808. That compares with 9,871 total sales in May of 2012. Total year-over-year sales for Cadillac are up 36.6 percent.

Cadillac brand spokesman David Caldwell added that the circumstances of 2013 are radically different from 1976.

"In 1976, the luxury market had far fewer brands," Caldwell said. "There was Cadillac and

Lincoln. BMW was probably better known for its motorcycles. Mercedes was a good brand, but its presence in the U.S. was much smaller. Lexus, Infiniti and Acura didn't even exist."

So, Caldwell said, seeing such an increase in today's luxury marketplace, which is filled with tough competitors from around the world, is especially satisfying.

"It's so much more impressive to see this growth in the face of such tough competition," Cald-

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2013 Cadillac ATS

Chrysler Refuses NHTSA's Request for 2.7M Jeep Recall

by Irena Granaas

Chrysler made headlines last week by defying the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) request for a recall of two of the company's most popular Jeeps.

NHTSA asserts the vehicles have a design defect in the placement of their gas tanks, making them prone to catch fire when the vehicles are subjected to rear-end collisions, sometimes resulting in fatalities.

Chrysler issued a formal statement last week in which the automaker laid out its reasons for

declining the request by NHTSA to issue a recall of the Jeep Grand Cherokee, model years 1993-2004, and the Jeep Liberty, model years 2002-2007.

According to Chrysler, the recall would involve about 2.7 million vehicles.

"Chrysler Group has been working and sharing data with the agency on this issue since Sept. 2010," Chrysler said in its June 4 statement. "The company does not agree with NHTSA's conclusions and does not intend to recall the vehicles cited in the investigation."

Chrysler said the subject vehi-

cles "are safe and are not defective... We believe NHTSA's initial conclusions are based on an incomplete analysis of the underlying data, and we are committed to continue working with the agency to resolve the disagreement."

Chrysler Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne emphasized that driver and passenger safety "has long been the first priority for Chrysler brands," a commitment that continues, but added the company stands behind the quality of its vehicles.

In the June 4 statement, the automaker further said the vehicles

in question "met and exceeded all applicable requirements" of the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards.

According to Chrysler's own analysis, the incidents cited by NHTSA occur less than once for every million miles of vehicle operation, a rate "similar to comparable vehicles produced and sold during the time in question."

In a White Paper that Chrysler issued along with their refusal statement, the automaker cited a number of "problems" with NHTSA's analysis, including:

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Sergio Marchionne

Autonomous Driving? Not for a While, Says Expert Panel

by Jim Stickford

WWJ-Radio got together a panel of experts at the OCC campus in Royal Oak on June 5 to talk about the future of the autonomous car to academics and industry insiders.

Panelist David Zuby, chief research officer for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), said things are happening quickly with development of autonomous technology.

Zuby said that in 2004, the Defense Department entity DARPA (Defense Advance Research Project Agency) held a driverless car challenge and no one completed the course set out on an old Air Force base.

The next year, five companies

had tech that could complete the course.

He said Google is getting into the game and, from an insurance perspective, autonomous tech promises to make driving safer.

"A study done in 1970 indicated that nine out of 10 accidents were caused by some sort of driver error," Zuby said. "And that was in an era when we didn't have all these electronic distractions."

"About 30 percent of accidents are caused by people speeding or driving too fast for the road conditions. This technology could really help. We know already that forward collision warning tech reduced accidents by 7 percent."

"This tech, combined with au-

tomotive braking tech, reduces accidents by 14 percent. This technology will take a long time to become universal."

Airbags have been required in cars since the 1990s and 12 percent of vehicles on the road don't have airbags, Zuby said, adding that, overall, autonomous tech promises fewer crashes and fewer deaths from crashes.

Kirk Steudle, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), said he looks at autonomous tech from the infrastructure perspective. He asked, "What happens when 50 percent of vehicles on the road have this tech? That means that 50 percent won't."

"There will still be a lot of 'dumb' cars on the road," Steudle

said. "That means there will be a messy transition from dumb to smart cars."

He said that it's not up to the OEMs to figure out all the rules. That's where the government comes in. And that won't be easy, because in Michigan there are about 600 agencies that have jurisdiction over roads and bridges. And most communities have at least one traffic light.

Rules and regulations dealing

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Kirk Steudle

High School Students See Automotive Career Chances

by Irena Granaas

Designers and engineers from GM, Ford and Chrysler were on hand June 4 to showcase some exceptional samples of their work at the "Where Innovation Meets Design" auto showcase at the Utica Center for Science and Industry (UCSI).

The automotive design reps interacted freely with Utica Community Schools and about 1,000 UCSI students from freshmen to seniors at the event, which included demonstrations of concept sketching and detailing by hand, and using software.

Event organizer Harry Istok, who retired from Malow Junior High School in Utica in 2012, said the annual auto showcase program began in 2006 as something for his drafting students.

The first automaker to participate was GM. Ford came on board in 2009, and Chrysler has been part of the event since 2012.

"This is the only event like this in the world geared toward K-12," said Istok. "We're very fortunate to have all of the car companies in the area."

Joe Dehner, head of design for Dodge and Ram, was one of the key designers attending the June 4 event at UCSI. Dehner said Chrysler brought 13 design concepts to the event and had 45 employees taking part.

Featured Chrysler vehicles on display included a 2013 SRT Viper, 2014 Jeep Grand Cherokee Trailhawk II concept, a 2013 Jeep Wrangler Stitch concept, a 2013 Ram Power Wagon and a historic 1964 Chrysler Turbine.

"We see it as an opportunity to make students aware of Chrysler design and engineering opportunities, not only with the cars but with our employees," he said.

Of the employees, Dehner added, "These aren't just pretty faces. These are the people

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Big 3 Sales Continue to Set Records

Every GM Brand Chips in to Raise May Sales Marks

The sales story at GM is large. That's because sales of large pickups and large SUVs - along with Cadillacs - helped GM to another total company sales increase.

GM sold 252,894 vehicles in the United States in May, up 3 percent compared with a year ago. Retail sales increased 9 percent, fleet sales were down 10 percent and the fleet mix was 26 percent of total sales.

"Cadillac is growing faster than it has in almost 40 years, the pickup rebound is in full

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Ford's May Retail Sales Are Best In Eight Years

Led by Fusion, Escape and F-Series trucks, Ford Motor Company's U.S. sales grew 14 percent in May 2013, with cars up 9 percent, utilities 15 percent and trucks 18 percent.

Retail sales increased 17 percent, marking the best May retail sales results since 2005.

"Our fuel-efficient Fusion and Escape have set monthly sales records for four straight months," said Ken Czuby, Ford vice president, U.S. Marketing, Sales and Service. "F-Series sales - fueled by construction growth

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Chrysler Extends Streak of Monthly Sales Gains to 38

Buoyed by robust sales gains for its Ram Truck and Jeep brands, Chrysler posted a May sales increase of 11 percent, compared with May 2012.

Chrysler spokesman Ralph Kisiel confirmed that Chrysler enjoyed its best May sales since 2007, and last month's stellar sales performance extended the Auburn Hills-based automaker's streak of year-over-year sales gains to 38 consecutive months.

Eight Chrysler vehicles set sales records in May. Kisiel said sales for the Ram Truck brand

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