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2014 Ram 1500 Pickup

Ram Truck Brand Continues To Target Its Buyers' Needs

Since its launch as a standalone division of Chrysler Group in 2009, the Ram Truck brand has experienced steady sales increases.

"Ram trucks have achieved more than three years of consecutive year-over-year sales gains," said Reid Bigland, president and CEO – Ram Truck Brand, Chrysler Group. "We're seeing everything from premium, luxury trucks to value-priced models doing very well."

But it was even further back – 20 years ago, with the launch of the all-new 1994 Ram 1500 – that the design and technology pioneer was born. In 1994, Ram turned truck design upside down with radical-for-its-time, big-rig styling, Bigland said.

Two decades later, Ram Truck is reinforcing its technology and innovation with the introduction of the industry's only diesel-powered half-ton pickup. The brand continues to invest substantially in its products, infusing them with great looks, refined interiors, durable engines and features that further enhance their capabilities, Bigland said.

He added that Ram Truck has also grown sales and increased market share by developing and launching new pickup models targeted to specific buyer needs and wants, including: Tradesman, Outdoorsman, Express, Lone Star and Laramie Longhorn.

There is a strong demand for high-end pickups and Ram Truck will continue to offer three premium models: Laramie, Laramie Longhorn and Laramie Limited. These models cater to affluent pickup truck buyers.

For 2013, Bigland said, Ram is the only brand to offer pickup truck buyers best-in-class 25 mpg fuel economy, best-in-class 30,000-lb. towing and best-in-class 850 lb.-ft. of torque. "From a capability standpoint, we are clearly separating ourselves from the pack," he said.

"We expect the Ram Truck brand's momentum to continue into 2014 for a number of reasons," he added. "The first is demand. The average age of a truck, from half-ton pickups through Class 5 medium-duty trucks, is 13 years. Buyers are heading back to their dealers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

GM Adds 50,000 Square Feet to Its Global Battery Lab to Add Speed, Improve Value

Newly updated GM Battery Systems Lab at Warren Tech Center

General Motors has nearly tripled the size of its Global Battery Systems Laboratory, cementing the lab's stature as the largest battery lab in North America owned and operated by a major auto manufacturer.

"In the past four years, the competitive landscape in the electrification space has grown exponentially. This has required us to raise our game and draw a new line in the sand," said Doug Parks, GM vice president, Global Product Programs.

"To maintain our battery leadership, this additional real estate is filled with new capability that will help us improve speed to market for our next generation of battery systems and help us improve the value equation to our customers around the world."

The latest addition of 50,000 square feet brings to 85,000 the total square footage of the lab. The expansion made possible the increase in the number of pack-level test channels from 64 to 112 and cell-level test channels from 96 to120, Parks said.

GM spokesman Kevin Kelly said the battery lab opened up in 2009 in the Tech Center campus in Warren.

"This is our third and final expansion of the battery facility," Kelly said. "We didn't add more office space, we put in lab space. The battery facility is where the old Chevrolet performance center was. They used to put engines up on dynamometers to test them. Now they've come full circle, so to speak. They are now testing batteries 24 hours a day to see how long they last."

GM's Global Battery Systems Lab has been responsible for testing and validating both battery cells and packs for all of GM's vehicle electrification systems, including the battery systems for the Chevrolet Volt, Cadillac ELR, Chevrolet Spark EV and GM's eAssist light electrification system, Kelly said.

The additional capabilities of the lab expansion include:

- Dedicated equipment for future vehicle battery system development such as charger development and testing, cord set testing and competitive benchmarking;
- Building prototype battery packs for vehicle development programs;
- The ability to act as the hub for validation and testing of all battery systems designed for use in future GM vehicles around the world.

The lab will also play a critical role in assuring GM's current generation of electric vehicles maintain their battery leadership position, Kelly said. Teams will validate and test updates to existing chemistries and system designs to make the most of performance and reduce cost. For example, updates were made to the battery system in the 2013 Chevrolet Volt that added three miles of EV range, Park said.

"GM is committed to vehicle electrification," said Larry Nitz, GM's executive director of Global Electrification Engineering, "and our products in this area must continue to excite customers.

"A critical part of this plan is to deliver safe, reliable and affordable energy storage systems. The new capabilities of this lab will enhance our engineers' ability to design, develop, process and validate class-leading products to meet the needs of our growing customer base."

In addition to the lab in Michigan, GM also operates battery labs in Shanghai, China, and Mainz-Kastel, Germany, which are tasked with testing and validation of battery cells, packs, and advanced battery system development.

Teams at the China, Germany and Michigan labs work collectively to test battery systems around the clock to reduce validation time, Kelly said.

Mark Pope, left, of the SAE and Mark Pedrazzi of BAE look at a Bradley M2A3 Busk III armored vehicle.

SAE Engineers' Eyes Widen On Tour of BAE Systems

by Jim Stickford

It was a little like taking a kid to a candy store.

That's how Mark Pope described taking a group of engineers on a tour of the BAE Systems building on Van Dyke on Sept. 16.

The Mid-Michigan Chapter of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) had visited the BAE facility when it was under construction.

Pope, a senior project engineer at GM and chairman of the chapter's membership board, said when the group learned they could visit the completed building and see some of what BAE is currently working on, they jumped at the chance. Everyone was on board, he said.

They are, after all, engineers, Pope said, and getting to see an operation like BAE Systems is like an acrobat going to the circus. Any chance they can get to view what others in their profession do, especially in the area of defense, they're going to jump on it, he added.

Pope said 33 SAE members toured the facility for about three-and-a-half hours and were able to look at how BAE engineers designed vehicles using the latest in teleconferencing technology.

"Mid-Michigan SAE members found it interesting because most of the employees at BAE are fellow engineers," Pope said.

Maintaining connections with companies like BAE is important to the SAE engineers, Pope said, primarily because there has been a lot of crossover for engineers switching from the auto industry to the defense industry and back over the past several years.

"When the economy went bad a few years ago, the automakers laid off engineers, especially Chrysler and GM," Pope said. "A lot of engineers were able to find positions in the defense industry."

But, Pope said, times have changed.

Five years ago, the United States was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now, the Iraq fighting is over and the country is getting ready to turn the fighting in Afghanistan over to the local

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2