



Mary Barra at Congressional committee hearing

Senators Fire Aggressive Questions at GM CEO Barra at Recall Investigation

By MARCY GORDON and TOM KRISHER
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) – Members of a Senate subcommittee accused General Motors of trying to cover up problems with an ignition switch that is now tied to 13 deaths, and pressed CEO Mary Barra to commit to punishing anyone involved.

Panel members also told Barra

that GM should tell owners to stop driving all the 2.6 million cars being recalled for the faulty switch until they are repaired.

GM is currently telling owners that the cars, mainly Chevrolet Cobalts and Saturn Ions, are fine to drive as long as nothing is placed on the key chain.

Barra said many details Congress is seeking will come out in an internal GM investigation that should be completed in 45 to 60

days. She also tried to assure lawmakers that GM is now more focused on safety and the consumer. Many senators were disappointed and not convinced.

The questioning from the Senators was more aggressive, with many focused on the ignition switch, namely how GM approved a replacement in 2006 but never changed the part number.

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Limited Edition Mopar Challenger Sells Out

The joke was on anyone who tried to order the special limited edition Mopar '14 Dodge Challenger on the second day it was available.

The limited-edition vehicle, the latest Chrysler vehicle to come straight from the factory already upgraded with Mopar products, sold out in just the first day after being made available to dealers.

Mopar spokesperson Pat Caporali said the special edition was limited to 100 vehicles and orders for it began on March 31.

"By the end of the business day, we were sold out," Caporali said.

The Mopar '14 Challenger, Caporali said, is the most recent

limited-edition vehicle offered by the brand, continuing the success of the Mopar '10 Challenger, Mopar '11 Charger, Mopar '12 300 and Mopar '13 Dart in demonstrating how owners can personalize their rides with Mopar products – even before driving away from the dealership.

With only 100 built, the Mopar '14 Challenger is the rarest limited-production Dodge Challenger offered to date.

"The very high demand for the Mopar '14 Challenger spotlights the success of our limited-edition, Mopar-modified vehicles, and also clearly demonstrates the passion our customers have for personalizing their rides,"

said Pietro Gorlier, president and CEO of Mopar, Chrysler's service, parts and customer-care brand.

"Whether during or after the ordering process, Mopar is there to help put a personal touch on customers' rides."

Tim Kuniskis, president of the Dodge Brand, said, "The Mopar '14 Challenger shows that when combining a legendary car like the Dodge Challenger R/T Shaker and making it even more exclusive, we create collectible performance machines unlike anything else on the road."

"From the Mopar '14 Challenger to the new Scat Pack performance stage kits available on Challenger, Charger and Dart,



Chrysler's new limited edition Mopar '14 Dodge Challenger

you can continue to expect great things when Dodge and Mopar team up."

Many unique features contributed to the Mopar '14 Challenger's quick sellout, Caporali

said, including two exterior color options and three Mopar Blue stripe options. A 5.7-liter HEMI V8 engine also rumbles beneath

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Car, Truck Sales a Surprise with Strong Finish in March

By DEE-ANN DURBIN
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) – U.S. auto sales went out like a lion in March.

Automakers said new car and truck sales picked up speed halfway through the month, culminating in a strong final weekend.

The month saw some big gainers. Chrysler's sales rose 13 percent on demand for Ram pickups and the new Jeep Cherokee SUV.

GM sales were up 4 percent with Encore, Regal and SRX leading the way.

Ford sales rose 3 percent, with a 5 percent gain for the F-Series pickup compensating for lower car sales.

March sales helped rescue what was otherwise a disappointing first quarter. Analysts had predicted flat growth for the first three months of this year after harsh weather in January and February hurt sales.

The surprisingly strong March results could help the first quarter pull off a sales increase, but it's not likely to top the 6 percent increase that the industry saw during the same period in 2013.

Jesse Toprak, the chief analyst for the car-buying site Cars.com, said the fundamentals that helped the industry rebound from the recession remain the same. Low interest rates, declining unemployment and attractive new vehicles will continue to bring buyers into showrooms.

But they won't be buying at the same pace. Since 2010, U.S. sales have grown an average of 10 percent each year, but they're now reaching a natural peak, he said.

"We are certainly transitioning



Sterling Heights Assembly employee helps Chrysler keep up with demand for its 200 model as sales surge.

GM March Sales Rise 4 Percent; Market Share Up

General Motors dealers delivered 256,047 vehicles in the United States in March 2014. Total sales were up 4 percent compared with a year ago. Retail sales were up 7 percent and GM gained retail market share.

Fleet sales were down 5 percent due to a planned reduction in rental deliveries, said GM spokesperson Jim Cain. However, commercial fleet sales were

Chrysler Extends Year-Over-Year Sales Increases

Chrysler's March 2014 sales continued the automaker's winning streak.

The company reported U.S. sales of 193,915 units, a 13 percent increase compared with sales in March 2013 (171,606 units), and the group's best March sales since 2007.

The Jeep, Dodge, Ram Truck, and Fiat brands each posted year-over-year sales gains in

Fusion, F-150, MKZ Lead Ford's Boost In March Sales

Ford's U.S. total March sales of 244,167 vehicles are up 3 percent from a year ago.

Retail sales of 166,030 vehicles are up 3 percent and represent the best March result in eight years.

"March sales turned noticeably higher mid-month and finished strong," said John Felice, Ford vice president, U.S. Marketing, Sales and Service.

SAE Will Feature Ride and Drive At Cobo Apr. 8-10

The three-day 2014 Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) World Congress comes to the Cobo Center in Detroit April 8.

Keynote speaker for the event is O. Kevin Vincent, chief counsel of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, who will kick off the session in Cobo's Grand Riverview Ballroom B at 8:30 a.m.

Other keynote speakers include Dr. Peter Phelps of the Institute for Mobility Research, BMW Group, who's scheduled for Wednesday, April 9, at 9 a.m. in the Grand Riverview Ballroom. B. Myles Kovacs, founder of *DUB Magazine*, will speak on Thursday, April 10, at 9 a.m.

This year's Congress presents attendees with the opportunity to go to professional development seminars and attend the SAE's Career Fair.

Ride-and-drive opportunities will be available for those interested in trying out the latest in automotive technology. Vehicles available include the 2014 Ford Fusion Plug-In, the 2014 Jeep Grand Cherokee Summit Diesel and the 2014 Hyundai Tucson FCEV.

The event will also give companies seeking automotive engineering professionals an opportunity to meet with prospective candidates, said SAE spokesperson Shawn Andreassi. The Career Fair will be held at Cobo Center April 8 from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and April 9 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the SAE World Congress in Detroit.

For more information on the three-day event, go to SAE.org/congress.

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F-150s roll off assembly line.

Fusion, F-150, MKZ Lead Ford's Boost In March Sales

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"Fusion set an all-time record in March, as overall retail sales in the West continued to expand at the fastest rate in the nation – including California being up 32 percent. F-Series also had a very strong month, as did Lincoln MKZ."

Ford F-Series truck sales reached 70,940. During the last seven years, F-Series has surpassed the monthly 70,000 truck mark only four times. Last month marks F-Series' highest March sales volume since 2008.

"Based on Polk retail registration data, we have seen the half-ton V6 pickup truck segment grow 600 percent over the last three years," said Ford Sales Analyst Erich Merkle.

"F-150 is responsible for 91 percent of that growth and this provides F-150 with 78 percent share of the V6 half-ton pickup segment."

Lincoln MKZ sales of 4,052 vehicles are up 72 percent, setting an all-time monthly sales record. The strong performance of MKZ drove overall Lincoln sales to a 31 percent increase in March, the sixth straight month of sales gains. During the last six months, Lincoln has increased sales 27 percent with 43,445 vehicles sold.

"Lincoln still has a long way to go, but we're very pleased with the fact that MKZ had its best sales month ever in the month of March. Since its launch in late 2005, it beat every month with over 4,000 MKZs sold," Merkle said.

Ford Fusion sales of 32,963 vehicles were the most since the vehicle was introduced in 2005. The Western region of the U.S. continues to drive Fusion retail sales higher, including a 22 percent increase in March.

"We sold almost 33,000 Fusions in March, and that was up 9 percent over a year ago," said Merkle. "Where we saw the greatest growth was in places like the West, where retail sales growth was at the fastest rate – about 22 percent in March year-over-year."

"In California, retail sales were up 32 percent over a year ago, so we continue to make very good inroads particularly in the Western region of the country," Merkle said.

And, inventories are right where Ford wants them, Merkle said.

"For this month, we're at 71 days," he said.

Jeep Grand Cherokee Earns Praise for Winter Driving

For the fourth straight year, the Jeep Grand Cherokee has been named the "Official Winter Vehicle of New England" by the New England Motor Press Association (NEMPA).

"The Jeep Grand Cherokee has now taken the overall Winter Vehicle honor every year since 2011," said NEMPA President Craig Fitzgerald.

"This unprecedented fourth consecutive win is due to the EcoDiesel engine and eight-speed transmission – new features that put Grand Cherokee at the top of both the power-with-efficiency and value curves.

"Grand Cherokee continues to manage New England's snow and ice with highly competent handling and traction, an excellent ride and a comfortable, tasteful interior, with proper cold-weather amenities.

"Wherever it goes and whatever its assignment, the Jeep Grand Cherokee stands out in the crowded SUV and crossover segments."

Significantly updated for 2014, said Chrysler spokesperson Todd Goyer, Jeep Grand Cherokee delivers "best-in-class" 30 miles per gallon mileage and a driving range of more than 730 miles, along with a new eight-speed transmission, three advanced 4x4 systems and more than 60 safety and security features.

"Particularly in one of the harshest winters on record, we're delighted that the influential members of the New England Motor Press Association have once again recognized the all-weather capability of the Jeep Grand Cherokee," said Mike Manley, president and CEO – Jeep Brand.

"Our new EcoDiesel engine and eight-speed transmission further add to the blend of capability, refinement and fuel efficiency that have made Grand Cherokee the most awarded SUV ever."

Through February, Jeep Grand

Cherokee sales are up 21 percent in 2014 in the U.S., and up 23 percent in the Northeast, Goyer said.

NEMPA is unique among regional motor press organizations.

Its media members represent all six New England states, reaching one of the largest populations in America.

NEMPA's automotive writers and talk show hosts influence consumers who are in the market



Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT8 Vapor, left, and Jeep Grand Cherokee Alpine

to buy cars and trucks in order to cope with the region's punishing weather conditions.

Winning vehicles are chosen, Goyer said, on how they meet the specific needs of New Eng-

land drivers during winter.

Goyer added, "We believe all Jeep vehicles offer consumers outstanding capability in all weather conditions – including winter, of course."

UAW Rebuilding Its Ranks, Faces Challenges

NEW YORK (AP) – The United Auto Workers membership grew by nearly 9,000 people last year, the union said in a filing with the Department of Labor, the fourth-straight year that the union has rebuilt its depleted ranks.

The UAW's due-paying membership now stands at 391,415, compared with 382,513 in 2012.

The UAW hit a low of 355,191 in 2009, the year when both General Motors and Chrysler filed for bankruptcy.

The Detroit Three may have mostly recovered from the industry's nadir five years ago, but the

UAW still faces many challenges.

The UAW had roughly 1.5 million members in 1979 at its peak.

Annual dues collected by the UAW, the union's main source of income, have fallen more than 40 percent from 2006 to 2013.

However, the drop appears to have stabilized this year, as total dues in 2013 were \$115.1 million, up slightly from \$115 million in 2012.

The union also failed in February to rally enough worker support to organize Volkswagen's factory in Chattanooga, Tenn.,

even with the passive support of the VW plant's management.

The VW plant was considered a major test for the union to push its membership into the South, where several domestic and foreign automakers have been opening up factories.

To bolster its ranks, the UAW has been increasingly pushing to organize workers in non-automotive industries.

The UAW said it organized casinos in Ohio and Las Vegas and was able to organize the graduate student employees of New York University.

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Senators Fire Aggressive Questions at GM CEO Barra

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Failing to change the part number makes the part harder to track. Anyone investigating the cars wouldn't know why earlier switches were failing at a higher rate than later ones.

While Barra called the failure to change the part number "unacceptable," several members of the panel implied that it was done intentionally by a person or group within the company, and raised the possibility the action could constitute a criminal violation.

"I don't see this as anything but criminal," said Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., a former prosecutor.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., told Barra that the more he hears and sees about GM, "the more convinced I am that GM has a real exposure to criminal liability. I think it's likely and appropriate that GM will face prosecution."

The Justice Department is conducting a criminal investigation of GM's handling of the recall. Barra promised the company will cooperate with the probe.

Barra said the company has not yet fired any employees in connection with the recall. But she said if inappropriate decisions were made, GM will take action, including terminating those involved.

As she began her testimony, Barra faced an angry and skeptical Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., the head of the subcommittee, who recounted the story of a woman who died in an accident involving a faulty switch.

McCaskill said GM had "a corporate culture that chose to conceal rather than disclose."

McCaskill also dismissed Barra's claim that there is a new culture at GM. She said that emerging from bankruptcy in 2009, GM had ample time to recall cars



Mary Barra

equipped with the faulty ignition switch.

GM only began recalling the cars in February.

Blumenthal, who has already submitted a bill that would require the government to make accident reports public, said GM should immediately tell drivers who own the recalled cars not to drive them until they're repaired because they're unsafe.

GM has said the ignition switch can move from the "run" position to the "accessory" position because of weight on the key chain. That causes the engine to stall, cutting off power-steering and power brakes, and deactivating the front air bags.

GM plans to begin repairing the cars this month, but has said it might take until October to get them all fixed.

Barra said GM has already provided 13,000 loaner cars to drivers who are concerned. But she also said that the company's testing, on different road surfaces, shows the cars are safe as long as there is nothing but the key on the key chain.

'She Didn't Make Mistakes' – Consultant

By PAUL WISEMAN and DEE-ANN DURBIN
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) – General Motors CEO Mary Barra didn't squirm on the hot seat last week.

On the job less than three months, she calmly answered or deflected tough questions from a congressional committee about faulty parts responsible for at least 13 deaths and the recall of 2.6 million cars.

Barra frustrated lawmakers by fending off questions, saying she was awaiting the results of an internal GM investigation. She didn't know why GM waited more than a decade to recall cars it knew had defective ignition switches. She didn't know who was responsible for the decisions that delayed the recall.

But experts on corporate damage control said she didn't have much choice and gave her high marks for her performance on the hot seat.

"Barra's rope-a-dope is the best of GM's bad options today," said Washington crisis management consultant Eric Dezenhall. "There isn't a corporate lawyer in the country that's going to allow her to engage in freelance speculation about things she doesn't know yet. No, that's not satisfying to the public and media, but the alternative is much worse."

Investors shrugged. General Motors Co. stock, down more than 7 percent since March 11,

barely budged after the hearing, slipping 8 cents to \$34.34.

Barra apologized for GM's slowness in warning customers about the problems and promised to change the automaker's culture to put a new emphasis on safety.

"Barra held her ground, claiming that today's General Motors is a different company from the one whose corporate culture allowed this issue to fester for a decade," said Jack Nerad, executive editorial director of *Kelley Blue Book*, which lists the prices and values of new and used cars.

Congressional appearances can be a minefield for CEOs. In 2008, automaker CEOs drew public scorn for flying corporate jets to Washington to ask for a government bailout. And Wall Street CEOs were battered in hearings after the financial crisis.

But some lawmakers appeared somewhat more sympathetic to Barra, who was thrust into a crisis after becoming the first woman CEO of a major automaker in January.

In 33 years at GM, Barra worked in engineering, communications and human resources. She's a second-generation GM employee: Her father was a GM die maker for four decades.

Not everything went smoothly for the new CEO last week, who flew commercial to the hearing.

Barra struggled to explain how GM could continue to use parts that didn't meet its own specifications. When she tried to draw

a distinction between parts that didn't meet specs and those that were defective and dangerous, Republican Rep. Joe Barton said: "What you just answered is gobbledegook."

Dan Hill, president of a Washington firm that advises clients on public relations and crisis management, said Barra erred by contrasting today's safety-conscious GM with the belt-tightening GM that sought bankruptcy protection in 2009.

"Barra threw the old GM under the bus by saying that the previous company that she grew up in and held executive positions in was based on a 'cost culture' as opposed to a 'customer first' culture," Hill said, noting that the implicit criticism of her predecessors could be used as ammunition in lawsuits against GM.

But some corporate image experts praised Barra for seizing the initiative by announcing that GM has hired Kenneth Feinberg – who handled the fund for the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Boston Marathon bombing and the BP oil spill – to explore ways to compensate victims of accidents in the GM cars. Barra didn't commit GM to setting up such a fund.

"She didn't make mistakes," says Gene Grabowski, a crisis management consultant who helps executives prepare for congressional testimony.

"That's how you survive a hearing."



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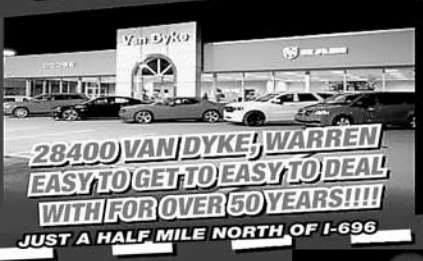
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Limited Edition Mopar Challenger Sold Out Early

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the Satin Black Shaker hood scoop, while exterior design elements include 20- x 8-inch Gloss Black aluminum wheels with Mopar center caps, a unique Black Vapor grille surround, a black fuel-filler door, a Satin Black deck-lid spoiler with Gloss Black "Mopar Design" badge and "Mopar" quarter-glass decals.

Customers ordering the Mopar '14 showed they still wanted the rarest limited production Dodge Challenger offered to date with additional customization, Caporali said.

Of the 100 orders placed, 52 customers chose the Pitch Black exterior paint version, while 48 opted for the newly offered Bright White option.

The traditional Shaker stripe proved to be the most popular graphic chosen for their ride, Caporali said, with the second-most popular being the bodyside

decal, and then the rocker stripe. Top Custom Shop options chosen were hood pins, Mopar Performance badges, quad exhaust tips and the Challenger monogrammed car cover. The top-ordered Mopar Performance part was the Cat-back exhaust to complement the Shaker intake.

Although all 100 Mopar '14 Challenger vehicles have been spoken for, enthusiasts can still build their own similarly personalized and unique Challenger, Caporali said.

Customers taking delivery of a new Challenger can have their ride personalized in a similar way to the sold-out version right at their local dealership, Caporali said.

Existing owners "who have their own Challenger pride-and-joy at home also can have their vehicle updated with Mopar parts and accessories to make it similar to the sold-out version," he said.

Fiat Eyes More Production

TURIN, Italy (AP) - Fiat and Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne said last week that the merged company will be able to increase production to more than 6 million cars a year, a level he has long said is the minimum for an automaker to compete in the global marketplace.

Marchionne aims to complete the legal merger of Fiat and Chrysler by the end of 2014 to create Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, the world's seventh-largest automaker, and will outline a new multi-year business plan in Detroit in May.

"By 2018, Fiat will be able to make more than 6 million cars,"

Marchionne told reporters after a Fiat shareholders' meeting in the Italian company's headquarters in Turin.

"I don't want to give any details of the plan, but we are going in that direction."

The carmakers delivered a combined 4.4 million cars last year, and Marchionne said they aim to sell 4.5 million to 4.6 million this year, mostly on the strength of the U.S. and Asian markets.

He had often cited the 6 million figure as a threshold automakers need to reach to be profitable in the increasingly crowded global market.



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Chrysler Extends Year-Over-Year Sales Increases

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

March compared with the same month a year ago.

The Jeep brand's 47 percent increase was the largest sales gain of any Chrysler Group brand during the month.

"We are entering the spring selling season on a high note as our Jeep and Fiat brands recorded their best sales months ever and Chrysler Group extended its streak in March to 48 consecutive months of year-over-year sales increases," said Reid Bigland, head of U.S. Sales.

"Our Ram pickup truck posted its best March sales in 10 years."

Six Chrysler Group vehicles set sales records in March.

The Jeep Compass and Jeep Patriot, the Fiat 500L, and the Dodge Journey mid-size crossover each posted their best monthly sales ever, Kisiel said.

The Jeep Wrangler and Ram Cargo Van each recorded their best sales for the month of March, Kisiel said.

With its 27 percent increase, the Dodge Grand Caravan had the largest year-over-year percentage sales increase of any Chrysler models in March.

Ram pickup truck sales increased 26 percent.

The new Jeep Cherokee mid-size SUV weighed in with its second-best sales month since arriving in dealerships in October.

This wasn't the only good news for Chrysler.

Durango sales were up 22 percent in March compared with the same month a year ago, extending its run of year-over-year sales gains to 17 consecutive months.

It was the Durango's best March sales since 2005.

With its 15 percent increase, the Dodge Charger had its best March sales since 2007.

Dodge brand sales were up 1 percent in March compared with the same month a year ago, the brand's best March sales since 2007.

Chrysler finished the month of March with a 71 days supply of inventory (525,927 units).

U.S. industry sales figures for March are internally projected at an estimated 16.2 million units Seasonally Adjusted Annual Rate (SAAR).

Car, Truck Sales End March with A Strong Finish

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from a market that was in hyper-recovery mode to a mature market where double-digit gains will be increasingly difficult to attain," Toprak said.

Based on the first quarter, Toprak lowered his full-year U.S. sales forecast to 16.1 million vehicles from 16.5 million. The industry sold 15.6 million cars and trucks in 2013.

LMC Automotive, a data firm, also lowered its annual sales forecast, to 16.1 million vehicles from 16.2 million.

Others said improving weather and increases in incentives should boost sales as spring progresses. Weaker-than-expected sales in January and February caused cars to pile up on dealer lots, and automakers will likely offer more deals to get them sold.

"The momentum built in March should set the market up for a big month in April," said Alec Gutierrez, a senior analyst with Kelley Blue Book.



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GM's March Sales Increase 4 Percent, Market Share Up

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

up 5 percent for the fifth consecutive monthly increase.

"Our retail market share was 15.3 percent, up one-tenth of a point," Cain said.

"GM's retail sales, like the weather and the economy as a whole, have been on an improving trend since early February," said Kurt McNeil, U.S. vice president of Sales Operations.

"We expect to see solid economic growth in the months ahead, with the job market, household income and consumer spending all showing positive signs. It is a strong backdrop for the launch of our all-new heavy-duty pickups, large SUVs and other new products, like the Cadillac ATS coupe coming this summer.

"Our dealers continue to work hard to exceed people's expectations for customer care, whether they are shopping for one of our award-winning new products or coming in to have their vehicle serviced," he said.

Cain said March retail sales highlights compared with the same time in 2013 showed deliveries of the Chevrolet Silverado – the 2014 North American Truck of the Year – were up 14 percent and the GMC Sierra was up 23 percent.

Deliveries of Chevrolet passenger cars were up 10 percent, Cain said. The Spark was up 17 percent; Sonic was up 20 percent; Volt 7 percent; Impala 103 percent; and the Corvette – the 2014 North American Car of the Year – was up 221 percent.

Deliveries of the Cadillac SRX rose 37 percent, Cain said. In addition, the CTS family was up 11 percent on the strength of the

new 2014 CTS sedan, which is the 2014 *Motor Trend* Car of the Year. Sales of the Buick Regal were up 52 percent and the Encore up 71 percent.

Sales of large SUVs increased 62 percent, with availability of the new 2015 models building, per plan, Cain said.

GM's incentives as a percentage of average transaction prices, or ATPs, were 10 percent compared with 10.3 percent for the industry, according to J.D. Power PIN estimates through March 23.

That is down from both the month of February and year over year, Cain said.

GM's ATPs set a record of about \$34,000, up about \$2,000 per unit from February and more than \$3,800 from a year ago, according to J.D. Power PIN estimates, Cain said.

U-D, U-M Students Recognized for Energy Efficiency

DETROIT (AP) – Mayor Mike Duggan and Shell oil company are scheduled to recognize students from the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor who are building energy-efficient vehicles as part of a global competition.

Shell officials said the students test drove their built-from-scratch ultra-fuel-efficient vehicles last week at Cobo Center in downtown Detroit.

They will compete in late April in the Shell Eco-marathon Americas 2014 in Houston. Last year's winner recorded 3,587 miles on one gallon of gasoline.

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Look...It's a Boat, It's a Car...It's a Supercar, the Gibbs Sports Quadski

by Jim Stickford

Gibbs Sports Amphibians, founded by an Englishman and a New Zealander, set up shop in Auburn Hills because metro Detroit was one of the few places in the world that had everything the young company needed.

Gibbs spokesperson Graham Jenkins said Gibbs Sports Amphibians makes vehicles that operate as well on the water as on the road. The original idea came from New Zealand industrialist Alan Gibbs in the mid-1990s.

"Alan Gibbs is a keen boater," Jenkins said. "There is a place in New Zealand called Kaipara Harbor. The tide goes out as much as a mile during low tide. He saw there was a real need for a boat that can launch and recover itself under such conditions."

Gibbs then set about to create a vehicle that would do just that, Jenkins said.

When English aerospace engineer Neil Jenkins heard about Gibbs's work, he decided to check it out.

"He was ravished by what he saw," Jenkins said. "Neil is my father and he always enjoyed cutting-edge technology and what he saw was something he had never seen before."

Jenkins said one thing his father brought to the table was a new perspective. He noted that most engineers don't so much create something new as refine something that always existed.

It was Jenkins who suggested that they use composite materials for the hull. That would make the vehicle lighter without sacrificing structural strength.

The two men joined forces and Gibbs Sports Amphibians was created. Much of the research and development was done in Britain, where they spent many years working on their designs, and by 2012, they were ready to put one of their prototypes - the Quadski - into production.

The question became where to build their factory. The answer was metro Detroit.

"We chose the Detroit region, specifically Auburn Hills, because, believe it or not, there aren't many places in the world that had everything we needed," Jenkins said.

Among the things that set Detroit apart was its infrastructure. The area has a large harbor, rail and highway connections, as well as all the suppliers any manufacturer would need.

"We're talking auto suppliers, but auto suppliers have the experience and expertise to make what we need," Jenkins said. "And the area has people with the skills that we need to assemble our products."

And that's important, Jenkins said. Having people who are experts in setting up the manufacturing processes needed to move a product from prototype to production counts.

"With a prototype, you might have a dozen technicians working on the concept," Jenkins said. "But developing a manufacturing process that is efficient that can produce that concept on an industrial scale is almost as difficult as coming up with a working prototype."

Jenkins said the biggest surprise when they were considering setting up shop was how friendly and helpful people were.

"When we were looking at Detroit there was such a warm and supportive atmosphere," Jenkins said. "That was a bit of change from Britain, where people are more reserved. We had a lot of people willing to work with us. I think that's because here people realize that manufacturing is still a good way to generate wealth, even in the face of competition from places like China."

"Remember, Detroit was once the wealthiest city in the world

based on the strength of its manufacturing prowess. People around here still remember that and realize the importance of manufacturing."

Jenkins said they started considering metro Detroit in early 2012. So when the company announced it was setting up shop in Auburn Hills in September of that year, a lot of the work had already been done. That's why they were able to produce their first Quadskis by January 2013.

"We didn't reach high production levels until about August of 2013," Jenkins said. "Next for us is a vehicle we're calling the Humdinger. It looks sort of like an off-road truck. We're working with one of our licensees on it. The Humdinger should be out in the next couple of years."

The company received a boost in publicity earlier this year

when the BBC television show, "Top Gear," featured a race in and around Lake Como in Italy between host Jeremy Clark, who drove a Gibbs on land and water and co-host Richard Hammond who drove a car on a land-only route. Clark won the race.

About 150 people work in the Auburn Hills plant, Jenkins said. They are looking for production associates with experience who can work on an assembly line and produce quality work.

"We have a strong engineering team," Jenkins said. "We're looking for people with a wider perspective than your average Big Three engineer."

Ultimately, Jenkins said, Gibbs Sports Amphibians has been successful because they think outside the box.

In the past, other companies have done a good job of creating



With tires folded up, the Quadski seemingly flies through the water.

a machine that can be a road vehicle as well as a water vehicle.

But the difference between them is that a Gibbs machine

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All prices & payments include GM rebates. Pictures may not represent actual vehicle. Prices subject to change per GM incentives. Prices and payments are inclusive of active GM Employee Discount (Unless otherwise stated). Leases are 36 months, 10,000 miles per year w/ approved S Tier credit w/ \$999 due at signing, (unless otherwise noted). Prices & payments are plus tax, title, and plate fees. Refundable security deposit required on certain vehicles - to be determined by lender. Must qualify for Conquest or Loyalty. \$3500 trade-in guarantee for 2003 or newer vehicle in drive-able condition with less than 115,000 miles, less any reconditioning costs, no branded titles, see sales person for details. **Certain restrictions may apply, see dealer for complete details. Expiration Date - 4/30/2014

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