

U.S. Economic Strength Revealed at SAE

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

The 2012 SAE Congress in Detroit last week proved to be more eventful than perhaps was planned.

When was the last time an SAE speaker was interrupted by protesters?

So it was last week at Cobo Center, where on Opening Day, General Electric's CEO, Jeffrey Immelt, was interrupted twice during his keynote kickoff talk by protesters unhappy with GE's tax rate.

This more or less repeated itself nearby at the RenCen, where coincidentally GE was hosting its annual shareholders meeting in Detroit, all to make the impression that mostly through its Van Buren Township complex, GE, an overlooked supplier, is very much part of the greater Motor City auto industry as well.

Welcome to Detroit, GE. Thanks to the protesters, the giant company is now thought of locally as something more than a purveyor of kitchen consumer products.

Immelt's announcement about adding 300 jobs to GE's complex in Van Buren Township seems to have been forgotten in the wash, so to speak, but surely the greater domestic auto industry can only benefit from the rapid-but-quiet growth of GE in

these parts.

Elsewhere, Cobo was teeming with papers, tech talks, Career Fairs, ride-and-drives and the like, such is the complexity of the annual SAE Congress that gathers to discuss mobility engineering issues every April, when 10,000 gather from around the globe to celebrate all things techy, if techy is a word.

For that matter, SAE released a study that showed that its thousands of global members fare better than average on jobs, salaries and benefits.

The relative strength of the U.S. economy compared with other regions of the world was reflected in the latest biennial SAE International Salary Study, released during the SAE International 2012 World Congress, while the overall strength of transportation and mobility industries has strengthened the employment prospects for technical applicants around the world.

"As the transportation equipment industry moves out of the recession and back into a hiring pattern, it's good for both employees and employers to know the prevailing wage for comparable levels of expertise," says Bill Cariello, manager, Web Strategy & Operations at SAE International, and co-sponsor of the study with SAE International's Publi-



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

The Cadillac XTS and Cadillac CUE entertainment simulator, background, were the main components to the GM pavilion display at SAE Congress in Detroit last week.

cations department.

"I find it particularly gratifying that SAE International members enjoy an advantage in both income level and income growth over non-members. Regardless, this study is a reflection of our commitment to serving the entire global mobility engineering community."

Around the world, the mean salary for engineering and related technical positions in mobility industries increased from \$89,700 in 2010 to \$91,800 in 2012, or 2.3%. Engi-

neers in the U.S. fared better than the global average, as well, the study reports.

Elsewhere at the show, Auburn Hills supplier FEV debuted an experimental marine engine based on the Cadillac CTS-V powertrain while Honeywell Vice President of Engineering Steve McKinney gave a well-attended talk on recent advancements in turbo technology led by Honeywell's own DualBoost rotor design.

Turbocharging and all of its variations are seen as enabling the auto industry to, for



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

This faux-Supremes group stopped traffic with their karaoke version of popular old Motown song "Chain of Fools" in the main lobby at Cobo Center during SAE Congress last week in Detroit.

example, replace a V6 engine with a four-cylinder one with a built-on turbocharger, further enabling an approximate 20 percent fuel savings, all while reducing the number of cylinders and overall weight of the engine.

That's what they discuss at SAE these days, and 13 years

from now, if the domestic industry actually meets the EPA's stretch goal of 54.5 mpg, that accomplishment can, perhaps, be traced back to these early-century SAE gatherings, where some very bright people continue to figure out how to improve auto transportation increment by increment.

VW to Increase Passat Production At Its Chattanooga Assembly Plant

By ERIK SCHELZIG
Associated Press

the sedan topped 14,500, according to Autodata Corp.

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) – Volkswagen will add 800 new jobs at its Chattanooga, Tenn., plant to boost production of the popular Passat sedan.

The jobs will increase the plant's workforce to more than 3,500 by the end of the year, the German company said last week. The additional workers will be used to bolster the existing two shifts at the plant, and expand production to Saturdays.

"We're adding a third team at this plant for a simple reason: Customers want to buy Passats," said Jonathan Browning, president and CEO of Volkswagen of America.

Volkswagen sold nearly 23,000 Passats in the U.S. last year, an 83 percent increase over 2010. Sales have been stronger so far this year. Through February, sales of

VW built its first Passat at the plant last April. It now rolls out 35 cars an hour at the plant, which surpassed 50,000 vehicles in February.

"Volkswagen is definitely on a roll in this market," Browning said. "I can assure you, we don't plan to stop."

Volkswagen AG, the world's second-largest car company, said last week that it intends to increase deliveries and revenues in 2012 despite difficult conditions in Europe.

Earlier this month, the company said it will open a \$40 million distribution center for parts about 80 miles from Chattanooga. VW plans to hire about 45 people at the center.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam welcomed the announcement. "Twenty-five percent of the Volkswagens sold in America will be made in Tennessee now," he said.

'Invest in Technology Now,' Says GE CEO Immelt

By Jim Stickford
Special Writer

General Electric CEO Jeffrey Immelt spoke at the recent Society of Automotive Engineers International 2012 World Congress at Detroit's Cobo Center about how Americans can improve the economy.

Immelt broke down his suggestions into 10 points.

He began by saying Americans, both in business and the government, should invest in technology. Right now, the U.S. is investing in tech at a rate of 2 percent, while GE is investing at 6 percent. That figure needs to grow, he said.

He then said that improvements in already existing technology, such as jet engines and internal combustion vehicle engines can be improved by using what he call the Industrial Internet. GE is able to improve the efficiency of jet engines and car engines by using sophisticated computer programs that make engines run better, saving airlines and truck companies billions in fuel expenses.

He noted that last year airlines lost about a combined \$3 billion. By improving engine output, fuel costs can be reduced by about that same amount.

His next point was about the importance of renewing manufacturing. It's important to the U.S. economy and the United States can compete with other

countries. Take appliances, he said. GE makes them here, and while labor expenses are higher, material costs and transportation costs are lower. By making these figures work, GE can make these products here. Other companies can do the same, he suggested.

It's also important to export, Immelt said, adding that when U.S. companies win over there, they win over here. Globalization is here to stay and companies can't thrive by running away from it.

"We also need to train more high-skilled workers," he said. "There are a lot of jobs going wanting for lack of skilled workers." Businesses also could help with access to community colleges and other training programs.

Businesses and insurers and healthcare providers also need to control health care costs, said Immelt. GE has an experimental program in Cincinnati that, by working with insurers and health-care providers, has been able to reduce the rise in costs to the rate of inflation.

Immelt pointed out that the United States should also take a leadership role in the development of new kinds of energy production.

"We have a lot of natural gas, great wind corridors and the best labs and universities," Immelt said. "The U.S. doesn't suffer from challenges that have

to be solved, rather it's a matter of making the costs work to create the infrastructure needed to support alternative energy sources."

A variety of different kinds of powertrains exist. There's ethanol, compressed natural gas and hydrogen-powered vehicles, as well as electric vehicles, Immelt said. They all can play a part in the future of the country.

Again, it's a matter of controlling costs, Immelt said. One way is finding a procedure that can repurpose used EV batteries, which reduces their cost and makes them more practical.

These suggestions can best be achieved by business universities and businesses working together.

Immelt cited the example of a GE plant that has 400 workers and one manager. People are smart and if you empower them, they will find better ways to get things done. By empowering people and getting public-private partnerships going, big and small businesses can co-

operate, own the supply chain and refresh American industry.

Finally, we have to create jobs, said Immelt, who is on President Obama's Jobs Commission.

He admitted that the administration is implementing 40 of the 85 suggestions presented by the committee, but anything that requires bipartisanship is being put on the side because of the current political mood.

Investing in infrastructure, making regulations easier to follow and training more engineers are all things that can work, he said.

Immelt concluded his speech by saying American business is better positioned to compete in world markets than in past years. One thing that's needed is the confidence to compete.

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