

Hot Rod Power Tour Revs Up on Streets of Ferndale

by Gerald Scott
Oakland Tech News

The 2012 version of the Hot Rod Power Tour kicked off in the metro area last week and the proverbial good time was had by all.

Hundreds of cars, including many from out of state, turned out at the GM Heritage Center in Sterling Heights for the kick-off event. *Hot Rod* magazine is the sponsor of the annual cross-country road tour.

Overall, this year's Power Tour is trekking from Detroit to Dallas. Its first three days were in the Detroit area and included stops along 9 Mile Road in Ferndale to mimic the Woodward Dream Cruise, as well as a stop on Black Lake at the GM Proving Ground in Milford.

Said organizer Chris Pokorski from the Detroit Convention Bureau, "that was decided by General Motors and *Hot Rod* magazine, last year they hosted our Long Haulers event and it was very well received by those that participated.

"It was just the logical choice to return this year.

"The order for today is we're here at the GM Heritage collection from 9 to 11 a.m. Later this afternoon, we'll be in the city of Ferndale where the Woodward Dream Cruise began (in 1995). We figured we wanted to give everyone a taste of Woodward and entice them to come back in late August and experience the full-blown thing itself."

Pokorski added that it was a simple coincidence that the Hot Rod Power Tour overlapped with the Chevrolet Detroit Grand Prix on Belle Isle – both events were in town over the same weekend.

This meant that the Power Tour was able to have its car owners park at a special corral on Free-Prix Friday, on

June 1, and enjoy the IndyCar racing with the rest of the fans attending the first day of action there.

Last Saturday put the cruisers at the GM Milford Proving Ground, so between the GM Heritage Center in Sterling Heights, 9 Mile Road in Ferndale and the IndyCar racing on Belle Isle, out-of-towners, especially, got a measure of what the Motor City has to offer in terms of chrome, exhaust and squealing tires, which is the spoken language of the car cruiser world.

As far as Milford went, "Participants and vendors will be directed to Black Lake, where they'll park and all the vendors will be on display. They usually have dyno testing and the vendors have giveaways," Pokorski said.

Over on 9 Mile Road in Ferndale, one couple enjoying themselves was Tom and Deb Bradfield from rural Logansport, Ind. They brought up their 2008 Pontiac Solstice – tricked out with a Corvette LS 3 engine in it, and every time Deb revved the very loud en-



Deb Bradfield guns the Corvette LS3 engine inside her 2008 Pontiac Solstice in Ferndale.

PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

gine, car guys came running from up and down 9 Mile Road to see what the fuss was about. Which, one supposes, is exactly the point when it

comes to car cruising.

The tour also visited downtown Mt. Clemens and Warren City Hall before departing for the week-long run to Dallas.

Score it as a victory for cruising, though, and another good event that the Convention Bureau said it was going to want to bring back in the future.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

The Hot Rod Power Tour parked itself along 9 Mile Road.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Rob Harris shows off the Viper engine in his 1951 Buick.

A.H. Chamber Sets Aug. Date Golf 'Fore' Day

More than 100 golfers are expected at Fieldstone Golf Club on Aug. 16 for a 10 a.m. shotgun start of the annual golf outing "Open . . . Fore Business."

The event is held by the the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce, and will be sponsored by the business community in and around Auburn Hills.

Plex Systems, Umicore, Autoliv, Oakland University, Baker College, Waterhouse Photography and Hirotec America are among the sponsors.

To register, sponsor or donate items, contact the Chamber at 248-853-7862.

Fieldstone Golf Club is the city of Auburn Hills' top-rated municipal course.

Cruise Will Host Royal Oak Walk

The Woodward Dream Cruise, Inc. (WDC) last week announced the inaugural "Cruise in Shoes" 5k Fun Run/Walk through the streets of Royal Oak taking place the morning of Aug. 18 – the same day as the 2012 Woodward Dream Cruise.

The run/walk event will begin at 7:30 a.m. on Yorba Linda Blvd., continue with a rare opportunity to run on historic Woodward Ave., wind through several Royal Oak neighborhood streets before finishing at Shrine High School campus.

"The addition of the Cruise in Shoes 5K run is meant to bring more family fun to the Woodward Dream Cruise experience," said Greg Rassel, president of the WDC.

Anyone interested in participating in the Cruise in Shoes event can register by going to www.Cruiseinshoes.com/registration until Aug. 16.



Chrysler Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne listens to Gary Fahrer, Team Leader Mentor, as he toured the Belvidere Plant in Illinois recently. Darts are now on their way to dealerships across the country, the launch is duly noted, a marque returns.

Dodge Darts Roll to Join Battle of the Compacts

BELVIDERE, Ill. (AP) – The first Dodge Darts to come out of a revitalized Chrysler plant in Northern Illinois were shipped off to dealers this week, setting the stage for what chief executive Sergio Marchionne called the automaker's "real battle" in the compact market.

The 2013 Dart five-seat sedan, made at the Belvidere assembly plant, has received good reviews from automotive analysts so far and will now be judged by consumers.

"Our future hangs on how well we do here," Marchionne told reporters last week after meeting with the plant's workers.

"I've been public on this before. I can probably get one car wrong. Of all the cars I can get wrong, it ain't this one. This one is too visible, it's too large, it's got too much embedded into it to go wrong."

The Chrysler Group LLC CEO was visiting the plant for the second time this year to congratulate workers, the *Rockford Register Star* reported.

Marchionne leads Italy's Fiat SpA and took over Chrysler in 2009 after the company filed for bankruptcy protection.

Around that time, the plant in Belvidere had far fewer workers than it does today

and briefly shut down, leading to fears it could close for good.

Now, Chrysler is on target to boost the plant's workforce to 4,500 this year, strengthening the outlook for a once-dominant manufacturing area.

The fuel-efficient Dart is Chrysler's first compact sedan since 2005. The compact sedan segment is the second-largest in the U.S. automotive market.

"Obviously, the Dart is a big step forward for us because we've been absent of a competitive product in the compact market in the U.S. forever," Marchionne said.

"All the efforts we've made so far have been made by effectively fighting and repositioning the SUV and the pickup truck market. We have had some success in the large sedans with the Chrysler 200 and 300."

"The real battle for us in this marketplace starts today."

Marchionne decided to build the Dart at the Illinois plant and added jobs there as part of a 2010 package of \$62 million in state tax breaks and other incentives given to the automaker.

He announced last week that the Jeep Compass and Jeep Patriot, which also are assembled in Belvidere, will go out of production in August 2014.

Marchionne Praises Dart Quality During Belvidere Visit

BELVIDERE, Ill. – Nearly four months after his first visit to the Belvidere Assembly Plant when he announced the addition of 1,800 new jobs, Chrysler Group LLC Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne returned to the plant to celebrate the launch of the all-new Dodge Dart with about 1,000 employees.

His visit coincided with the one-year anniversary of when the automaker repaid its U.S. and Canadian government loans, six years early.

"The repayment proved what could be achieved by hard work and determination, by not giving in when the going is tough, but rather finding the strength to get back on one's feet and move forward," Marchionne told Belvidere's first-shift employees during a town hall meeting.

"That day marked an extraordinary achievement, and a new beginning, once again free to chart our own future."

The future for Chrysler Group is represented by the new Dodge Dart, which officially rolled off the assembly line on May 7, 2012, and will begin arriving in dealer showrooms in June.

Chrysler invested nearly \$700 million in the Belvidere plant to make it the first assembly plant to build a Fiat-derived architecture on a Chrysler model.

In addition, Chrysler Group is adding nearly 1,800 jobs to support Dart production and add a third shift in the third quarter.

"The Dart is really a bellwether of how well Fiat and Chrysler can make this partnership work," said Marchionne.

"This first child is the start of a big family that is going to grow, that will explore new experiences, will become more capable and more aware of its possibilities as its horizon grows wider and brighter."

During his visit, Marchionne toured the plant, hearing presentations from employees about the changes that have been made to integrate the Dart on the same assembly line as the Jeep Compass and Jeep Patriot and how they have implemented World Class Man-

ufacturing (WCM) to improve safety, quality and productivity.

Marchionne told employees during the town hall meeting that his visit was meant to celebrate the start of production, but "more importantly, it is important for me to recognize all of you for your efforts and a commitment that has guided us to this remarkable point."

The Dodge Dart blends Alfa Romeo DNA with Dodge performance and style. The new Dart will be available with 12 exterior colors, 14 interior color and trim options, three powerful, fuel-efficient engines, three transmission choices, numerous safety features, and Dodge aerodynamics.

"From all reports, it has been an outstanding production start," Marchionne told employees.

"In fact, the body build is the best that our executive team has ever seen."

"I want to thank you for having embraced the philosophy and the mission that are at the core of our company; putting what made this nation great into what you do every day, pride and integrity in what you produce, the culture of doing things and doing them well."

"I'm here to convey congratulations to each and every one of you for a job well done."

The Belvidere Assembly Plant was constructed in 1964-65. The first car was produced on July 7, 1965. The product line from 1965 to 1977 included the Plymouth Horizon and Dodge two-door and four-door models, and station wagons, and the Chrysler Town & Country station wagon.

In 1977, the plant was converted to front-wheel-drive production. From 1978 to 1987, the product lines included Plymouth Horizon and Dodge Omni.

In 1987, the plant underwent a \$367 million state-of-the-art, 16-week model changeover to produce the Chrysler New Yorker and Dodge Dynasty, the company's full-size front-wheel-drive four-door sedans.

Two years later, the plant underwent a \$72 million model changeover for production of 1990 models that included the

Chrysler Imperial and New Yorker Salon.

In 1994, the plant was converted to produce the Plymouth and Dodge Neon. Production of the Neon ended in September 2005.

The Dodge Caliber was launched in December 2005, followed by the Jeep Compass in May 2006 and Jeep Patriot in December 2006. The last Dodge Caliber rolled off the line on Dec. 19, 2011.

In October 2010, Chrysler Group announced that it would invest \$600 million to support the production of future models in 2012.

The investment includes the construction of a 638,000-

square-foot body shop as well as the installation of new machinery, tooling and material handling equipment.

In January 2012, the Dodge Dart was revealed at the North American International Auto Show, showcasing the combined engineering and technologies of Chrysler Group and Fiat. Production of the new Dart began on April 30, 2012.

On Feb. 2, 2012, Chrysler Group announced that the original \$600 million investment had increased to \$700 million and that the plant would add 1,800 jobs by the third quarter of 2012, which includes nearly 500 for production of the all-new Dodge Dart.

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