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Prefix Ready to Paint Viper At New Joslyn Road Facility

Story and Photos
by Bill Springer

The former Kmart location on Joslyn Road is now home to the “finest paint finish in the world,” according to Prefix Corp. president and COO James Adsit.

The company will paint the 2013 Dodge SRT Viper panels at the new Auburn Hills coatings facility.

Prefix Coating hosted a grand opening for Viper owners and industry guests last weekend.

The finish on the SRT Viper will be done by hand. The striping will be imbedded between the layers of paint, with no protruding edge on the stripe, creating a smooth transition.

Matt Leija works in the stripe room, and he described the process in layman’s terms. “The stripe is applied first,” he said. “In the case of the hood, the jig positions over the panel, then a pencil line is drawn by hand off the jig. Within the pencil lines, the stripe remains. Outside the pencil line, the body color is applied.”

Eric Zeile, Chrysler program manager at Prefix and son of owner Kim Zeile, said, “The SRT Viper is one of the most Detroit-built vehicles. It’s painted in (metro) Detroit and it’s built in Detroit.”

“I’m proud to keep it here, we had no intention of painting it elsewhere.” When asked, why Auburn Hills, Zeile said the city was “overwhelmingly positive, almost like a rubber stamp.”

The Prefix plant has 50 employees at present, in preparation for production. More employees will be hired in time for startup in 2013.

“We don’t plan on stopping at 125 jobs,” said Zeile. “Achieving the best means taking the process to the highest degree. It has to be done by hand.”

Prefix Coatings was awarded the contract to produce the show-quality paint finish through a 100 percent manual process for the 2013 SRT Viper, which will be built at Chrysler Conner Assembly in Detroit.

In previous years, Prefix was the supplier for the striping programs for the Dodge Viper and the Dodge SRT Commemorative Edition vehicles.

One of Chrysler’s specifications for the 2013 SRT Viper was to create a 9-plus orange peel final finish that provides a near mirror surface and achieves “the finest production paint finish in the world.”

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Viper owners descended on the former Kmart on Joslyn Road, which was the scene of a gathering for the Prefix Coatings open house.



Inside, Jim Martin observes a complete set of Viper panels.

GM Plug-ins Play Big Role

General Motors says it will have up to 500,000 vehicles on the road with some form of electrification by 2017 with a focus on plug-in technology, the company’s top product development.

“The plug-in offers a unique opportunity to change the way people commute,” Mary Barra, senior vice president of Global Product Development told media attending the GM Electrification Experience in San Francisco.

“Plug-based solutions will play a significant role in our technology portfolio going forward.”

The plug-in Chevrolet Volt extended-range electric vehicle, introduced in 2010, has become more than a statement for GM in the electric vehicle space, Barra said by satellite from Detroit.

“What started out as a technology proof point . . . has turned into a real-world starting point to push EV technology further and faster than we thought possible five years ago,” she said.

“The unique propulsion technology pioneered in the Volt – the same technology that will be featured in the Cadillac ELR – will be a core piece of our electrification strategy going forward.”

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Galyen talks EVs at the recent Battery Show in Novi.

Public Needs to Understand How EVs Work – SAE Exec

by Jim Stickford

One of the problems with selling battery-operated vehicles to the public is that people don’t understand or trust the technology.

That’s where Robert Galyen and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) International Battery Standards Committee come in.

Galyen, CTO of NingDe Contemporary Amperex Technology, was a speaker at The Battery Show held in Novi Nov. 13-15.

The company is based in China, but Galyen has a long history working in the Detroit-based auto industry. He worked for GM between 1977 and 1998, and was an assistant chief engineer for Delphi Automotive in its lead acid battery business from 1998 through 2001.

He is also chairman of the SAE’s Battery Standards Committee, which is in the process of developing SAE standards for all aspects of battery systems, from construction to transport to storage to how they interact with different OEMs’ powertrain systems.

“One of the components to Elec-

trical Vehicle (EV) technology catching on is public understanding of how it works,” Galyen said.

“So it becomes very important for groups like the SAE to communicate with the public through every media – print, TV, the Internet, trade publications.”

Battery technology is complex. It’s chemical energy and can’t be turned off at the flick of a switch. Because most people don’t understand it, they are afraid of the technology.

When the NHTSA released information about a Volt power pack catching fire last year, it caused quite a stir with the public.

But, Galyen said, the NHTSA violated its own protocols and the fact that the battery pack caught fire two weeks after the staged crash got lost in the news shuffle.

He pointed out that it is highly unusual for a wrecked car to stay in someone’s garage two weeks after it was totaled. Those vehicles usually get taken to a salvage yard.

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Chrysler Lights Up Detroit with \$240M In Metro Area Plants, and New Jobs

by Jim Stickford

There’s good news today – especially for Chrysler Group and job seekers.

Chrysler Group Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne, along with Detroit Mayor Dave Bing and UAW VP General Holiefield, announced good news for metro Detroit at a press conference in Chrysler’s Mack I engine plant in Detroit on Nov. 15.

Marchionne said the company will invest \$198 million in the Mack I plant to produce the company’s Pentastar V6 engine, resulting in the addition of up to 250 new jobs, subject to market conditions.

In addition, Chrysler is investing an additional \$40 million in the company’s Trenton North engine plant to add a flexible production line that can run both the Pentastar engine and the Tigershark (I4) engine.

Warren Truck Assembly is adding 1,000 jobs on a third crew beginning in March of 2013 to produce the 2013 Ram 1500.

The announcement was the culmination of efforts dating back to June 2009. Since then, the company has invested \$4.75 billion in the United States and added nearly 6,000 hourly jobs.

“Today is another important milestone in living up to the commitment we made more than three-and-a-half years ago to our employees, this city of Detroit, this region and our country to transform the company,” Marchionne said.

“All of these investments are the direct result of a lot of people who have battled courageously

to bring Chrysler back to a state of growth. It is our contribution toward helping Southeastern Michigan get back on its feet.”

Marchionne said Chrysler’s comeback wasn’t possible without the help of its UAW partners, as well as city, state and local officials like Detroit Mayor Bing.

General Holiefield, VP and director of the UAW’s Chrysler department, said the new investment by Chrysler was a testament to the determination of labor and management to make the best of the second chance given to Chrysler.

Mayor Bing said that he’s enjoyed successful careers as a basketball player and a businessman. Chrysler has given elected officials such as himself an example to follow of an enterprise that has been able to turn itself around and prosper.

Holiefield praised Marchionne, saying that the Chrysler chairman

had delivered on every promise.

When asked about the situation in Europe, Marchionne said that a lot of manufacturers – Ford, Fiat, GM, Peugeot – have lost a lot of money and things have to change. He has believed that when something stops working, you tear it down and come up with something new. That’s what he did at Chrysler and that’s what has to be done in Europe.

On the subject of the contract with the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union, Marchionne said it was the result of tough negotiations by both sides. “Liking is a strong word to apply to the contract,” Marchionne said. “It’s an agreement we can live with.”

When questioned about Fiat’s finances, Marchionne said Chrysler borrowed \$7 billion last year and there were strict protocols limiting money being transferred to Fiat.

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Marchionne speaks at Chrysler’s Mack 1 engine plant Nov. 15.

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