

Detroit Auto Scene

31201 Chicago Road South
Warren, Michigan 48093

586-939-6800

Reader Input or feedback:
News@DetroitAutoScene.com
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William Springer II, publisher
and interim news editor;
Lisa A. Torretta, operations

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Chrysler Extends Streak of Monthly Sales Gains to 38

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surged 24 percent year-over-year in May, closely followed by demand for Dodge brand vehicles, with sales up 23 percent year-over-year.

Kiesel cited the company's improved technology – resulting in better fuel economy – and its product quality gains.

"We have a much more fuel-efficient lineup now, and that's obviously something consumers are demanding," said Kiesel.

He added that Chrysler now offers 14 models that achieve a fuel economy rating of 25 mpg or better, and of the 14, six obtain at least 31 mpg.

"We just came out with our new Jeep Grand Cherokee; and we redid our light-duty and heavy-duty Ram pickups," he said, "so there are a lot of factors that contributed to the sales gains."

In fact, Chrysler reported May sales increases for all of its Jeep brands.

The Jeep Compass crossover compact SUV surged 42 percent, its best sales month ever, and the largest sales gain among Jeep brands. Sales of the flagship Jeep Grand Cherokee also posted double-digit gains of 21 percent, its best May sales in eight years.

"We continue to see strong retail sales throughout our product lineup as eight Chrysler Group vehicles set sales records in May, including best sales ever by the Jeep Wrangler and Compass," said Reid Bigland, head of U.S. Sales.

"Sales of the Jeep Wrangler are incredibly hot," Kiesel said.

In addition, the Dodge Avenger and Dodge Challenger, the Fiat 500, the Chrysler 200 midsize sedan, and the Ram pickup truck were among the Chrysler Group vehicles that registered their best sales for the month of May.

Kiesel added that Chrysler's strides in improving the quality of its vehicles have third parties taking notice, which is also bringing buyers into Chrysler dealerships.

He cited the recent award recognition by Strategic Vision's annual Total Quality Index (TQI), survey of more than 17,500 owners of 2013 model-year vehicles, with the Dodge Dart compact car and Durango full-size SUV dominating their segment.

The Chrysler Town and Country minivan and the Chrysler 200 also ranked at the top of their respective vehicle segments in the survey.

"Four out of five of our brands were up last month, led by the Dodge and Ram brands," Kiesel said.

He added the Fiat brand was up 1 percent, "but the real news is, since we reintroduced the Fiat 500 in March 2011, we've posted 100,000 units sold in North America."

Autonomous Driving? Not for a While, Says Expert Panel

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with autonomous tech, he said, must answer questions like who's responsible in case of an accident – the "driver?" The company that made the tech? The owner of the vehicle?

Stuedle said that Nevada has regs that cover "driverless" cars, but they require additional licenses and training. He said that he thought the purpose of a driverless car was to make transportation easier, not be so complicated that additional training and licenses were required.

"Our approach is to have less government interaction and let the OEMs innovate," Stuedle said. "We want an environment that provides the most flexibility and innovation."

WWJ's John McElroy said the driverless car is not new. GM has prototypes that go back to the 1950s. He said we started seeing this technology in a more serious fashion back in the 1980s in Japan – but the infrastructure wasn't there yet.

But, McElroy said, we'll proba-

bly see this technology used in other countries first because of legal issues. OEMs won't want to have driverless cars until they can present a body of evidence backing up the technology, he said. And, ultimately, that won't stop people from suing OEMs if there is an accident.

He added that Detroit should be leading the world in the development of this technology.

McElroy said that he believes that trucking and agriculture will lead the way to developing this technology, noting that Caterpillar is already working on tractors that can be told to plow the south 40. He said trucks that can, for example, haul tar sand in Canada following regular routes would provide great savings and be more efficient because there would be no drivers who had to stop for bathroom breaks.

Stuedle said people and governments are adaptive. We've gotten used to dumb drivers on the roads who cause accidents, he said, so we can adjust to smart cars that reduce accidents.

John Capp, director of Safety and Electronics Innovation for GM's Global Vehicle Engineering, said people have to look at this technology much the same way they looked at devices like the automatic transmission. In the old days, he said, people shifted gears using a clutch, then the automatic transmission came along, and while some people still use a clutch, most people adapted to this new tech that makes driving easier.

"We have to figure out what we can do easily," Capp said. "As the technology progresses, there's no reason to think drivers won't progress as well, like they did with the automatic transmission."

Alan Korn, director of Advanced Brake Systems Integration for Meritor WABCO, said that as he gets older he has become more conservative.

"I am concerned about what happens when something happens and the driver isn't paying attention at the time of the incident," Korn said.

If people get used to not pay-

ing attention because the car is doing the driving, what happens when a system fails?

McElroy said Audi has already demonstrated a self-parking car.

Capp said that no matter what Google says, he doubts there will be a driverless car in the next five years. Korn agreed, saying that ABS brakes were introduced in 1990. The technology is simple by today's standards, but we're still learning about it.

We will need to learn a lot about driverless technology and its uses before it becomes universal, he said, noting that this technology will have to be proven safe before it's put on the market.

A member of the audience said that Google has tested its driverless technology to the tune of 400,000 miles driven. But he added that that's not a lot considering every year Americans drive trillions of miles.

He also pointed out that 400,000 is just a drop in the bucket and driving conditions in real life don't always match those of a test track.



2013 Dodge SRT Viper at Big 3's Innovation/Design event.

Big 3 Show Local High School Students Potential Automotive Career Chances

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who've actually worked on these concepts."

Chrysler, Ford and GM had staff members holding demonstrations inside the UCSI building for high school and junior high students from area schools, doing live sketching by hand and using software for both the interior and exterior auto design process.

"The kids are pretty impressed by that. We actually give them a chance to 'fly the plane,'" Dehner said.

He noted that Chrysler's participating isn't just something where they "come and go," but that the automaker works with major engineering and design schools like Lawrence Technological University and the College for Creative Studies in Detroit to help students determine what their options are if they are interested in pursuing a design or engineering career.

"We hope to hook the kids up with appropriate opportunities," he said.

Greg Cummings, group manager and superintendent of Digital Measurement, GM Design Fabrication Operations, said he attended a parent-teacher conference at his son's school (Malow) and left with an idea, later launching the "Where Innovation Meets Design" auto showcase.

Cummings said this is one of several GM outreach programs. Some others are Career Day for Scholastic Arts Gold Key Winners, where GM works with high school and middle school students, and "You Make a Difference," where GM and the College for Creative Studies (CCS) works with Detroit Public School students.

"It's programs like these that help us connect with high school and college-level students, their parents, educators and counselors, to make them aware of scholarship opportunities and also the diverse career opportunities out there," he said.

Cummings added that while there's been much focus in the educational world on STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), kids with artistic talent have a place in the auto industry as well.

"All cars start with a sketch," he said.

Inside the UCSI facility, students watched short videos and live demonstrations. Creative Designer Everard Scott was one of the Chrysler staff members interacting with students in small groups, highlighting how he uses a powerful software program, Photoshop, in the process of creating new designs.

"I've been using the program since 2001 and I'm still learning new things about it," he told the students who were watching him work on a design concept on a digital flat screen.

Ford Chief Designer Greg Cummings said, "We think it's important, especially for young people, to know this career is out there."

The half-day program definitely gave participating students food for thought. John Parke, 15, a freshman at Heritage Junior High School in Sterling Heights, came away with a positive impression after checking out the cars. Parke also attends UCSI half-days.

Parke found the "Where Innovation Meets Design" program inspiring.

"It's definitely rekindled my love for engineering," he said after checking out the cars.



Ford Master Modeler Tom Drobek demonstrates sculpting on the clay model that evolved into the 2013 Ford Fusion.



The 2011 Chevy Sonic "Boom" concept was also at the event.

Ford Sales Show Strong May Growth

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and pent-up demand – reached their highest level in more than six years."

Fusion posted its best-ever May sales of 29,553 vehicles – with its strongest areas of sales growth in the Western and South-eastern areas of the U.S.

The fuel-efficient Escape small utility posted its best-ever sales month since being introduced 13 years ago – a 26 percent increase with 29,123 vehicles sold last month.

Other Ford sales of cars were up as well. The Fiesta sold 6,693 in May of 2013, a 10.1 percent increase over the 6,080 in sales for May 2012. The Ford Focus sold 27,186 in May of 2013, a 9.8 percent increase over a year earlier.

Taurus sales saw a slight decline, going from 6,844 in May of 2012 to 6,515 this year. Mustang sales also dropped, going from 10,427 to 8,797.

Edge sales, on the other hand, increased 14.9 percent, going from 11,749 to 13,501. Explorer sales also saw an increase in May

vs. May of last year – going from 14,662 to 16,861 for a 15 percent increase.

As America's best-selling pickup, the F-Series had its strongest May sales result since 2005. F-Series' 71,604 sales in May represented a 31 percent increase versus last year and its 22nd straight monthly sales increase.

In May, Lincoln MKZ sales increased 42 percent versus last year. This represents MKZ's best-ever May sales, building on MKZ's best-ever sales month in April.

In addition, Ford said plans to build 740,000 vehicles in the third quarter, up 10 percent from the 673,000 vehicles produced in the third quarter of 2012.

The third-quarter plan includes the company's recent announcement to add 40,000 vehicles from a reduced July summer shutdown and the addition of 200,000 units of annualized straight-time capacity starting in the fall of this year.

Second-quarter production of 800,000 vehicles is unchanged from previous plans.