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A rendering of GKN's new regional headquarters in Auburn Hills.

Former AH Movie Complex To Be GKN Headquarters

GKN Driveline and GKN Sinter Metals are expanding their automotive operations and moving to a new regional headquarters for the Americas in Auburn Hills early next year.

The new site will also house employees from GKN's Land Systems and North American Services groups. Construction of the 168,000-square-foot facility is scheduled to begin this month on an 11.2-acre site at 2150 N. Opdyke Road, the location of a now-vacant Showcase Cinema complex, said Darren Greene, Marketing manager at GKN's North America office.

Headquartered in Auburn Hills since 1986, GKN has more than 300 employees at its current 113,000-square-foot facility at 3300 University Drive. Employment is expected to grow by 50 or more full-time employees in the next three years, Greene said.

"We like being in Auburn Hills," Greene said. "It's centrally located between the Big Three automakers and we have a good relationship with the city's local government."

GKN Driveline is the world's leading producer of automotive driveline components and systems, including constant-velocity-joint, all-wheel-drive, transaxle and electric-drive systems. GKN Sinter Metals is the world's largest producer of precision powder-metal products, Greene said.

GKN's new headquarters complex will provide additional space for state-of-the-art testing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Dodge Dart Earns Accolades from IIHS

The 2013 Dodge Dart earned a top safety rating from IIHS and NHTSA.

The 2013 Dodge Dart adds to its list of awards with a Top Safety Pick+ from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).

"We are very pleased that the Dart has earned a Top Safety Pick+ designation," said Tim Kuniskis, president and CEO Dodge Brand – Chrysler Group.

"In addition to its solid structure – the Dart's 68 percent high-strength-steel content ratio is one of the highest in the industry – the Dart boasts more than 60 safety and security features. They include 10 standard air bags, which is unsurpassed in the compact car segment."

The Dart previously earned Top Safety Pick status from the IIHS, recording the maximum possible rating in each of four crash tests used by the IIHS to evaluate occupant protection, the primary attribute of a Top Safety Pick, said Chrysler spokesman Eric Mayne.

The 2013 Dart achieved a score of "good" in tests that simulate rollover, rear, side and moderate-overlap frontal impacts. In addition, the Dodge Dart was awarded a 5-star overall rating for crashworthiness from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"The Dodge Dart redefines performance with an agile, fun-to-drive experience, compliments of its Alfa Romeo roots. It's crafted with high-quality materials and loaded with state-of-the-art technology and class-leading safety features," Mayne said.

The new Dart GT model builds on that foundation and offers attributes compact car buyers appreciate, such as a 2.4L engine with 184 horsepower, a sport-tuned suspension, available hyper black 18-inch wheels, along with class-exclusive features like an 8.4-inch Uconnect Touch-screen media center, Uconnect hands-free with Bluetooth, and LED racetrack taillamps, Mayne said.

The Dart provides drivers with the combination of power, efficiency, technology, style, and safety and security, all for a starting U.S. Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) "of just $15,995," Mayne said.

The 2013 IIHS Top Safety Pick+ award is the Dodge Dart's latest accolade. Others include:

- Most Important New Cars for 2013 List – *Washington Post*;
- Top 10 New Cars for 2013 – *Total Car Score*;
- 10 Coolest Cars Under $18,000 – *Consumer Guide Automotive*;
- 10 Coolest Cars Under $18,000 – Kbb.com;
- Best Value – Texas Auto Writers Association;

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

A Long and Winding Road, All the Way to Cruze

The Chevy Cruze is the latest in a long line of GM small cars dating back more than 50 years.

John McElroy, a journalist covering the auto business for more than 30 years and featured writer on the web site Autoline, said the Cruze's roots go farther back than many people believe.

"GM has been building small cars for a while now," McElroy said. "Believe it or not, they made a lot of nice small cars back in the 1920s and 1930s, but they stopped in the 1940s because we tend not to like small cars. Americans are bigger than a lot of people and believe they need a bigger car."

But not all people are "big" or want a big car, McElroy said. There are some buyers out there who, even 50 years ago, cared about mileage, or wanted an affordable car.

"And some people just like small cars," McElroy said.

So to meet that niche, GM came out with the Corvair in 1959. It met with limted success. Not a failure, said McElroy, but it also didn't light the auto world on fire.

"With that information in mind, Detroit's reaction to the VW Beetle was to laugh," McElroy said. "That is until they saw that people were buying them. Ford came out with the Falcon, which was small for the standards of the time. Today, it would be mid-sized. Chrysler came out with the Dodge Dart."

Bascially, everyone was trying to get a piece of the small car pie, McElroy said. GM even came out with the Chevy II in 1962. He said it was more like the Dart and the Falcon than the Beetle, but it "sold quite well."

But something happened that happens with every small car made – it got bigger.

"This is something I've seen with every small car, both foreign and domestic," McElroy said. "The small car gets bigger with every redesign. That's because when the manufacturer does market research, customers are asked what they want. The reply is invariably, 'I love the car, but it could use a little more leg room,' or 'it's a great car, but I could use just little bit more trunk room.'"

The result is that the next iteration of that small car model is a little bigger. He said the classic example of that size creep is the Honda Accord. When it started, it was as small as today's Honda Civic. By 1970, the Corvair was gone, McElroy said – though Ralph Nader had something to do with that. But even the Chevy II was dropped, McElroy said, "because Americans seemed to have lost their taste for small cars."

But GM didn't give up on that market niche. The company developed the Vega.

"The problem was that the Vega was a disaster," McElroy said. "It had all kinds of overheating problems and quality issues. As long as a Vega ran, it wasn't a bad car, but too many of them became unreliable."

Part of the problem, McElroy said, was that GM, in responding to the Ford Pinto, tried to do a lot with the Vega. It had an aluminum engine block that was lighter and was bolted to a cast iron head. The two metals cool at different rates, which caused a lot of problems and "GM didn't catch on until it was too late," McElroy said.

1975 Chevrolet Chevettes on display in the lobby of the former General Motors Building on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit's New Center Area.

"GM was already phasing the Vega out at the time of the first oil crisis back in 1973. GM recognized that the company needed to do something to plug the gap left by the Vega, so they looked around at what they had and saw the Chevette, which at the time was being built in Brazil and was designed in Europe."

What people have to remember, he added, was that business models and business technology were very different in 1973. Just making an international phone call was a bit of a task. There was no email, no faxes, no Internet. The Chevette was related to the Opel Kadette, which used GM's T-Car platform. It was the last Opel to feature rear-wheel drive.

"I remember when Ford wanted to combine its various individual European country operations into Ford of Europe," McElroy said. "People from Ford of Britain, Ford of Germeny, Ford of Italy were very critical. They said things like, 'Don't you know we have our own special culture that requires cars designed to meet those cultural needs?'"

So in 1973, when the Vega was "going south fast," said McElroy, GM had to come out with something and so it brought out the Chevette. It got great mileage, but was a cheap car.

"It was perfectly good for what it was, a car designed to be driven in Brazil," McElroy said. "That meant it had to be affordable for most Brazilians."

GM realized as time went on that there was a need for a vehicle with good mileage, but also with better technology, McElroy said. GM also needed a front-wheel-drive car. So they rushed the Chevy Cavalier, built on the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Steel Task Force Develops Design For Reducing Wheel Weight

To assist automakers in manufacturing vehicles that will meet the new fuel economy regulations while also offering style to consumers, the Steel Market Development Institute's (SMDI) Wheels Task Force recently unveiled the results of its latest lightweight steel wheel project.

The group's analysis of the project talked about how the SMDI developed a new steel wheel design solution that is equivalent in mass to a comparable aluminum wheel, but at a 40 percent cost saving. SMDI is a business unit of the American Iron and Steel Institute.

"This new steel wheel design provides automakers with a great foundation for a lightweight, affordable wheel that consumers will love," said Ronald Krupitzer, vice president, automotive market, SMDI.

"With automakers looking for solutions to develop lightweighting technologies, here is another example of steel matching aluminum in mass while beating aluminum in cost. It's also a highly styled wheel that will help sell cars."

This project applied state-of–the-art concept design and analytical methods to an existing high-volume wheel to achieve an advanced lightweight design that can be adapted to various vehicle platforms, Krupitzer said.

Advanced manufacturing processes and new steel grades were evaluated to increase the weight and cost savings potential for the wheel assembly design.