

'You Got a Lot Right'—J.D. Power to GM Orion Employees

by Jim Stickford

Quality is getting to be a habit at the GM Orion Assembly plant in Orion Township. And that's the way they want it.

GM held a special in-plant celebration Oct. 10 in recognition of the Chevrolet Sonic winning the 2013 J.D. Power Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout (APEAL) Study Award, as well as for the plant winning for the third time GM's Built-In Quality (BIQ) award.

Roman Lesnau, senior director, Global Automotive – J.D. Power, spoke to the crowd of employees and congratulated them on their achievement.

"We don't rate the vehicles ourselves," Lesnau said. "APEAL just keeps score."

And the Sonic scored very well with its drivers, Lesnau said, for the second year in a row. To put everything in perspective, APEAL measures 77 attributes across 10 different categories. Vehicles are judged on everything from seats and HVAC to driving dynamics.

"APEAL measures the things manufacturers get right," Lesnau said. "And, according to your customers, you got a lot of things right."

He said that Toyota and Honda, in the same vehicle category, finished well behind the Sonic. The biggest advantage the Sonic has is its engine performance and exterior style.

And most importantly, Lesnau said, there is a direct correlation between APEAL ratings and transactions. Vehicles with high APEAL ratings have better customer loyalty and turn faster on dealership lots.

"There's one final point I want to make," Lesnau said. "It's about the bigger quality story. We at J.D. Power are optimistic about GM's future quality. But it only gets harder from here on. GM is launching a number of new models in the near future and the competition is only going to get tougher."

What GM has to do, Lesnau said, is to get the public to understand that the quality of its vehicles has improved, and in many instances is better than Toyota or Honda. But the automaker is

in a good position to get that message out.

"Hopefully, I'll be back here next year to make it three years in a row that the Sonic won our APEAL award," Lesnau said.

Joe Ponce, executive director, GM Global Operations Quality, said it's always nice to have J.D. Power come to a plant and present an award. Ponce said he wants that to become a habit.

Gerald Johnson, vice president, North American Manufacturing, said that the celebration was what he called a "two-fer." The plant received the J.D. Power award and the BIQ award.

"I am particularly proud to be here today, because I remember the early days when we dreamed that the work we did here would be recognized as the best in the company and in the industry," Johnson said. "I remember what Mark Reuss said. 'It's not good enough to be competitive, we're playing to win.'"

Johnson said the workers should feel proud about what they've accomplished, but they have to remember that "you're only as good as your last win."

"You should celebrate today," he added, "but then go back to your jobs and work harder and smarter to produce quality vehicles so that you win more awards in 2014."

"We have a proud history, but we have an even brighter future. Like they say, build these cars like you own them."

Pat Sweeney, president of UAW Local 5960, said that he was glad that the plant had a good relationship with J.D. Power, but that was to be expected "because we see them here so often."

When asked what made Orion Assembly different from other GM plants, Johnson said in an exclusive interview, the answer was simple – nothing.

"This is a plant that executes GM's Global Manufacturing System, and as a result, I am here today to recognize the people here for their excellent work," Johnson said. "GM has 40 out of 56 plants in this region that have earned BIQ awards, and more than 100 plants around the world."

And the Sonic wasn't the only GM car to win an APEAL award,



Gerald Johnson, vice president, North American Manufacturing.

Johnson said, adding that this across-the-board quality has been achieved because people in the company have focused on quality like a laser.

"We now have internal and external metrics that show this ef-

fort has paid off," Johnson said. "As for letting the public know how well we're doing, repetition is the key. We have to achieve quality every day with every vehicle and every new program at every plant."

MCC to Host 'American Made Movie'

Macomb Community College will host a free screening of "American Made Movie," on Friday, Oct. 18. The documentary looks at the post-1979 decline in U.S. manufacturing and profiles entrepreneurs who are helping to reverse the trend of overseas production.

Doors will open at 6:30 p.m., with the film starting at 7:15 p.m.

A panel discussion will follow the movie at roughly 8:50 p.m. Register to attend by going to www.macomb.edu/movie.

The film will be shown in the John Lewis Student Community Center (K Building) on the college's South Campus in Warren.

Chris Michalakakis, president of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, is featured in the film.

Forcier Appointed CEO, Member of A123's Board

Battery designer A123 Systems in a statement to the press on Oct. 9 outlined its organizational structure and strategic focus as a member of the Wanxiang Group.

The Wanxiang Group, which acquired nearly all of A123's businesses last January, is one of China's largest enterprises that is not state-owned with approximately \$22 billion in annual sales. The operational scale and financial strength of Wanxiang provide the stability necessary for A123 to thrive during the ongoing industry consolidation, said A123 spokesman Jeff Kessen.

According to the plan released by A123 Systems, Jason Forcier has been appointed CEO, as well as a member of its board of directors.

As CEO, Forcier will oversee all battery cell and transportation-related sales, product development and manufacturing activities globally.

In his board role, he will work with the other members of the A123 board, Pin Ni and Tom Corcoran, to oversee all of A123 Systems.

"Combining the Wanxiang EV battery business with the global footprint of A123 offers great potential to enhance our global competitiveness," Forcier said. "Both organizations bring key skill sets that are critical to our collective success and together we are well prepared for growth in our target markets."

The company's executive team will be headquartered in Livonia and, said Kessen, A123 employs more people in the development and production of lithium-ion batteries in the U.S. than any other company.

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