

Looking Back at Big Three's Productive, Successful Year

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Global Development for Chevy, after she spoke of the success of Chevy. The brand was on a roll both here in the U.S. and across the globe.

"This global presence has helped Chevrolet achieve record sales in 2011 and 2012," Barra said.

"Last year (2012), we sold almost five million Chevrolets and it's the fastest growing auto brand in the world."

And, Barra said, 2013 was going to be even better for Chevrolet with the return of the Stingray.

Mark Reuss, president of GM North America, said this version of the Stingray will be both more powerful and more fuel-efficient than previous Corvettes, while having the best interior ever.

The Stingray wasn't the only model making a comeback in 2013.

On the heels of Jeep's great success with the Grand Cherokee, Chrysler brought back the Cherokee. In April, at the SAE World Congress in Cobo Center, the public got a good look at the new Cherokee.

"We have the new 2014 Jeep Cherokee on display at the show because we're focused on optimizing existing technology," said Eric Mayne, manager of Media Relations for Chrysler Communications, at the show.

What makes the Cherokee special, Mayne said, is the 9-speed transmission and other improvements in powertrain technology.

Ultimately, Mayne said, the new Cherokee provides performance without sacrificing power efficiency.

Ford also enjoyed success in 2013. The vehicle, which enjoyed record sales, also impressed professional auto journalists. The Midwest Automotive Media Association in February named the 2013 Fusion the Family Vehicle of the Year.

MAMA president Kirk Bell said the Fusion best met the group's criteria of a family vehicle, which was defined as costing under \$50,000, having four doors, being both reliable and efficient and having undergone a major upgrade within the previous year.

"MAMA pooled its collective expertise to pick the best family vehicle from a strong group of recent releases, and the Ford Fusion bested them all," Bell said.

Around the Fourth of July, Cars.com declared that the Ford F-150 was the "most made in the U.S.A." vehicle on the market.

The list is determined by analyzing three data points – domestic parts content, the final vehicle assembly point and vehicle sales.

"Strong sales and 75 percent domestic parts content propelled Ford's popular F-150 to the top of the index for 2013, a rank it held from 2006 to 2008," said Patrick Olsen, Cars.com's editor-in-chief.

"Ford's top ranking this year is a good indicator of how pickup trucks are dominating auto sales



2014 Corvette Stingray

so far in 2013, and how the domestic automakers are bouncing back."

A story that affected all the automakers in 2013 has been the race to develop autonomous driving technology.

Experts said that autonomous driving in some form is coming, but not just yet. At a special panel held at OCC's Royal Oak campus, David Zuby of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety said the technology is developing rapidly, and had the potential of saving lives.

"A study done in 1970 indicated that nine out of 10 accidents were caused by some sort of driver error," Zuby said. "And that was in an era when we didn't have all these electronic distractions."

"About 30 percent of accidents are caused by people speeding or driving too fast for the road conditions."

Semi-autonomous driving tech could really reduce these types of accidents, Zuby said. Kirk Steudle, director of M-DOT, said that there are still a lot of "dumb" cars on the road, and that won't change anytime soon. And, Steudle said, just determining which agencies have jurisdiction over autonomous driving technology will be difficult to sort out.

John McElroy of WWJ said that we will probably see this technology used first in Europe because of legal questions here.

"OEMs won't want to have driverless cars until they can present a body of evidence backing up the technology," McElroy said. "And, ultimately, that won't stop people from suing OEMs if there is an accident."

Steudle said that people and governments are adaptive. Just as "we've gotten used to dumb drivers on the roads who cause accidents, we can adjust to smart cars that reduce accidents."

Alan Korn, director of Advanced Brake Systems Integration for Meritor WACKO, said that "we will need to learn a lot about driverless technology and its uses before it becomes universal."

And that technology will have to be proven before it's put on the market. Google's testing of a system to the tune of 400,000 miles driven "is a drop in the bucket" compared with the trillions of miles Americans drive



Kirk Steudle

every year, Korn said. Driving on a test track and driving under real world conditions are two different things.

But the technology is only going to get better and he said as people get used to it, it will become more accepted.

And, perhaps the biggest story of the year came last.

In mid-December, GM announced the retirement of Dan Akers as CEO and that his replacement would be Mary Barra, making her the first woman to ever head a major auto manufacturer.

IHS auto expert Mike Wall said that Akerson's resignation shouldn't have been that big of a surprise. He always said he was a short-term leader who would hold the job only as long as it took to bring GM out of bankruptcy, Wall said.

The announcement was made the day after GM stated that the government had sold all its shares of GM stock.

Wall said that the only surprise was the timing of Akerson's retirement, but news of his wife's illness explained that.

And, Wall said, making Barra



Eric Mayne and the new Cherokee



2013 Ford Fusion

GM's new CEO was good news because of her broad experience in different departments at GM.

She helped develop and launch products, he said, and had been with the company for years, but turned only 52 on Dec. 24.

Her relative youth was

matched by other promotions at GM, meaning, Wall said, that the company had young and stable leadership ready to take it into a future where the company is not burdened with debt and is making some of the most competitive vehicles in the marketplace.

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Used Car Sales 2nd Highest

Used commercial vehicle registrations during the first nine months of the 2013 calendar year were up just under eight percent over the same period last year, according to Polk, which was recently acquired by IHS, said Polk spokesperson Michelle Culver.

Nearly 527,500 used commercial registrations were recorded during the January-September timeframe. This represented the second best nine-month level of used transactions since Polk started tracking used transactions in 2004, and trailing only

the record nine-month total of 649,950 transactions reported during the 2011 calendar year. Strong demand continues for clean used equipment to replace older equipment.

"The continued strength of used commercial vehicle transactions during the first three quarters of the calendar year reflects a competitive market for clean used equipment as it becomes available," according to Gary Meteer, director, aftermarket and commercial vehicle solutions at Polk.

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