

Encore Leads Buick to Global Sales Record

Buick's efforts to add to the brand by expanding its presence in the crossover market niche have proven successful.

The Encore, the fifth model in the Buick lineup – and its second crossover – rang up sales successes in its first full year.

“Right out of the gate, demand for the Encore was high,” said Tony DiSalle, vice president of Buick Marketing. “It accounted for most of the segment’s growth last year and that’s because it offers the right safety, technology, and features in the right-sized vehicle for many customers.”

Entering the small SUV and small luxury SUV segment in the U.S. at the end of last January, the Encore helped boost sales in a rapidly expanding market that just last year alone, grew by 52 percent from 2012.

As one of the first luxury crossovers of its size, Encore’s U.S. retail sales reached 31,046

units during its first full year of sales, said Buick spokesperson Nick Richards. Globally, the Encore sold 97,311 vehicles in calendar year 2013, helping Buick set its global sales record of 1,032,056 last year.

“The small SUV segment looks like the next hot spot in the new-car market,” said Karl Brauer, senior analyst for Kelley Blue Book. “The combination of functionality and fuel efficiency offered by models like the Buick Encore makes them a compelling value equation for consumers.

“We’re seeing rising research activity in these models from users of KBB.com, and we expect sales to grow in the coming months and years.”

Encore’s early entry to these segments is significant, Brauer said. Combined, the segments are expected to more than dou-

ble in sales between now and 2018.

The Encore earned an Insurance Institute for Highway Safety 2013 Top Safety Pick and 5-star Overall Vehicle Score for safety from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DiSalle said.

It also ranked highest in the Sub-Compact CUV segment in the 2013 J.D. Power Initial Quality Study and, among others, was named the winner of Kelley Blue Book’s 2014 5-Year Cost to Own awards in the Luxury Compact SUV/Crossover category, DiSalle said.

Encore customers cite good fuel economy, high quality and exterior design as the top reasons for purchase, with one in two buyers coming from a non-General Motors brand, Richards said.

Small SUVs Among Fastest-Growing Markets in U.S.

GENEVA (AP) – Carmakers are banking on the fast-growing demand for small SUVs to earn new customers in the U.S. and help turn around their businesses in Europe’s still-fragile market.

U.S. carmaker Chrysler’s Jeep brand launched the Renegade and France’s Citroen introduced the funky Cactus at the Geneva Auto Show on March 5. And they are just the start of a long list of carmakers looking to “come to the party,” said IHS analyst Tim Urquhart.

They are coming big and small.

Volkswagen, aiming to become the globe’s number one automaker by 2018, has rolled out the concept T-Roc while South Korea’s fourth automaker SsangYong will launch the XLV sport utility vehicle next year, with the goal of doubling European volumes from 3,000 last year to 6,000 in 2015.

The small SUV market is among the fastest-growing market segments in the U.S., where young people and downsizing baby boomers are attracted to the tall cabin, big cargo area, fuel efficiency and maneuverability.

And, in Europe, small SUVs have proven themselves more recession-resistant than most.

Among the vehicles shown at the Geneva Auto Show was the Jeep Renegade.

It has Jeep’s classic vertical grille and round headlamps, and can’t arrive soon enough for the brand’s owner, Chrysler.

It’s the well-known brand’s first serious small, fuel-efficient contender. It is considered key to Jeep’s goal of reaching 1 million in sales this year, an increase of nearly 40 percent over 2013.

In Europe, for instance, the market for small SUVs has grown to 1.1 million sales per year, said Mike Manley, president and CEO of the Jeep brand.

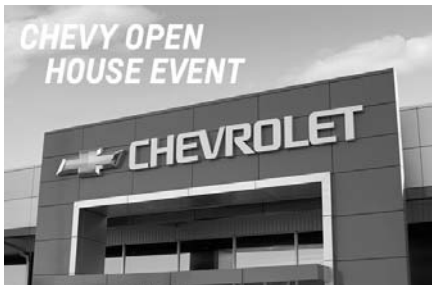
But the Renegade also will go after small SUVs in the U.S., such as the Kia Soul and Nissan Juke.

Manley said the price will be competitive enough to entice not only consumers looking to buy a small SUV, but also attract those who were considering sub-compact sedans or hatchbacks.

To get better mileage, the Renegade will have 16 engine and transmission configurations for different markets around the world, including the first nine-speed automatic transmission in a small SUV.

Transmissions with more gears generally help engines run more efficiently, especially at highway speeds. Two diesel engines will be offered in Europe, but not the U.S.

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