

## Tech Center News

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## Judge May Tell GM Owners to Park Recalled Cars

DETROIT (AP) – A Texas federal judge will hold a hearing this week on a lawsuit seeking to force General Motors to tell customers to stop driving some recalled cars.

Lawyer Robert Hilliard says Judge Nelva Gonzales Ramos in Corpus Christi could rule on April 4. Hilliard last week asked the court to make GM tell owners to park the cars until they can be fixed.

GM is recalling 1.6 million older Chevrolet Cobalt, Saturn Ion and other models to replace ignition switches.

The switches can slip out of the run position and shut off the engine. That cuts off power steering and brakes.

Hilliard contends the cars aren't safe even if people remove everything from key rings as advised by GM.

GM says the cars are safe if there's nothing on the rings, noting that a heavy key ring or jarring from rough roads can cause the ignition switch to move out of the run position and shut off the engine and electrical power.

Executives say that can knock-out power-assisted brakes and steering and disable the front air bags.

GM opened at least two investigations after reports of engine stalling but closed them after taking no action. At the time, the company was juggling eight U.S. brands and losing billions each year, leading to its eventual bankruptcy in 2009. Now, GM has cut excess brands and bureaucracy and is solidly profitable.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also conducted several investigations into the problem but never ordered a recall.

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# 'Old Faithful' Retires from Vari-Form After 10M Outputs

After 23 years of service, Vari-Form, a manufacturer in pressure sequence hydroforming, has retired the company's – and the world's – first machine to hydroform an automotive structural part.

Production of instrument panel beams on this machine for Chrysler S body minivans (Dodge Caravan, Chrysler Town & Country, Plymouth Voyager) began in July 1990, said Vari-Form spokesperson Terry Nardone. Over time, the press was used to produce structural parts for several subsequent generations of these vehicles.

Dubbed "Old Faithful" by Vari-Form engineers, production peaked at over 700,000 units per year in 1996, Nardone said. During more than two decades of active use, "Old Faithful" output equaled nearly 10 million units.

"If hydroforming presses could talk, 'Old Faithful' would tell us about the evolution of hydroforming as an essential automotive technology," said Vari-Form president Stephen Dow.

"Vari-Form pioneered the application of hydroforming to automotive structural parts, and

worked with a leading machine tool manufacturer to build this precedent-setting press to our specifications.

"Launching large-scale production on it in 1990 brought a new manufacturing concept to the automotive industry. At the time, we had to convince carmakers of the benefits of hydroformed assemblies – better quality, reduced space and weight, lower per-unit costs, and less tooling.

"Today, millions of vehicles in North America incorporate Vari-Form hydroformed parts. Many of those were produced on 'Old Faithful.'"

Dow said the future of hydroforming technology is the future of Vari-Form.

"We're constantly pushing the envelope to design and manufacture more sophisticated parts and complex assemblies," Dow said.

"Vari-Form works daily with our OEM and supplier partners to answer the design, performance, fuel efficiency, and safety challenges facing the automotive industry."

These latest developments, Dow said, include applications of

advanced materials permitting thinner walls to reduce part weight without sacrificing strength or stiffness – all produced on faster, more efficient equipment.

"Looking forward, we are constantly advancing the art and sci-

ence of body structures with developments like our Hydroform-Intensive Body Structures (HIBS) initiative," Dow said.

"Now in its third phase, HIBS is redefining the way vehicle builders and their suppliers view the structure of future vehicles."



'Old Faithful' in its last days at Vari-Form

## Good Launch for Chrysler 200 Could Mean Good Profits

by Jim Stickford

Chrysler's upcoming June introduction of the 2015 200 is a big deal because it can lead to big profits, according to a well-known industry analyst.

"The 200 launch is important to both the Chrysler brand and to Chrysler as a company," said Mike Wall, director of Automotive Analysis for IHS Automotive.

"The Sebring is from a couple of generations of design ago. Sergio Marchionne was able to get some work done on what would become the new 200, but it was only a moderate redesign.

"The Emimem commercial helped and the 200 has been an OK seller. But the mid-size market is very competitive and if Chrysler the brand and the company want to get the volume they want with the new 200, they have to launch it right."

And, Wall said, a good launch could mean good profits.

"They can't make all their money from pickup trucks and SUVs," Wall said.

"And if Chrysler is going to be a big car company with something to offer in all the market segments, then they have to have something like the 200.

"If it is successful, it can really

add to the company's bottom line and they won't be sending otherwise loyal customers who want a mid-size car to the competition.

"A company like Chrysler, when it wants to leverage economies of scale in production, will want to be in as many segments as possible."

So, Wall said, he's not surprised that the company has been promoting the 200 as much as it has. It's a fully post-bankruptcy design of a vehicle entering a profitable, but competitive, market niche, he said, adding that the automaker needs to let the public know about the car.

In a recent press release, Chrysler said the 2015 Chrysler 200 is the industry's first mid-size sedan with a standard nine-speed automatic transmission, which enables expected highway fuel economy ratings of 35 miles per gallon.

Spokesperson Kathy Graham said the Chrysler 200 sedan's "innovative available all-wheel-drive system" is the first to deliver an automatic fully disconnecting rear axle, improving fuel economy by reducing parasitic loss when all-wheel drive is not needed.

The 2015 200 also gives a

choice of two world-class engines: the 3.6-liter Pentastar V6 engine with 295 horsepower and 262 lb.-ft. of torque, and the standard 2.4-liter MultiAir2 Tiger-shark I-4 engine with 184 horsepower and 173 lb.-ft. of torque, said Graham. The I-4, she said, features state-of-the-art electronic shifting with rotary dial.

A design for the center console, made possible by full electronic gear shifting with rotary shift knob, is "beautiful as well as functional," Graham said. A unique pass-through storage feature that the driver and front-seat passenger can both access is enabled by the rotary-dial electronic shifting.

"This is a segment first," Graham said. An opening at the rear of the pass-through area allows wires and cables from items stored in the pass-through area to route directly to the hidden power supply located in the covered center console.

The center console features sliding cup holders, allowing drivers and passengers to use the space in a way that best fits their needs, she said.

The 200 will be built at the SHAP facility using World Class Manufacturing principles and a new, updated assembly plant.

This attention to detail is required, Wall said, because there are a lot of good cars in the mid-size segment.

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