

Malibu Awarded IIHS's 'Top Safety Pick-Plus' Rating

The 2014 Chevrolet Malibu with available Forward Collision Alert last week was named a Top Safety Pick-Plus by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

The distinction requires cars to receive high marks in crash-worthiness and achieve a basic, advanced or superior rating for frontal crash prevention.

The crash tests consist of front, side, roof strength and head restraint tests, said Chevy spokesperson Chad Lyons.

In order to receive 2014 Top Safety Pick-Plus status, the 2014 Malibu had to offer a frontal crash protection system meeting IIHS requirements as well as receive a "Good" rating – the highest classification used by IIHS – in four of the five crash tests and no less than an "Acceptable" – the second highest classification – rating in the fifth test.

This differs from the 2014 Top Safety Pick Rating that required a car to receive a "Good" rating in four of the five crash tests and no less than an "Acceptable" rating on the fifth test – without offering a frontal crash protection system meeting IIHS requirements, Lyons said.

The 2014 Malibu exceeded those requirements, achieving a "Good" rating in all five tests,

Lyons said. It also achieved a "Basic" assessment for the frontal crash prevention system when outfitted with the optional Advanced Safety Package.

That package was available on 2LT and above trim packages, meeting the requirements for the Top Safety Pick-Plus consideration.

The crash prevention system uses camera and radar monitors to determine the stopping distance to the vehicle in front of the Malibu, and will sound an



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Malibu receives a high rating after crash safety test for Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.



Mary Barra at Congressional committee hearing

Senators Fire Aggressive Questions at Mary Barra

By MARCY GORDON and TOM KRISHER
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) – Members of a Senate subcommittee accused General Motors of trying to cover up problems with an ignition switch that is now tied to 13 deaths, and pressed CEO Mary Barra to commit to punishing anyone involved.

Panel members also told Barra

that GM should tell owners to stop driving all the 2.6 million cars being recalled for the faulty switch until they are repaired.

GM is currently telling owners that the cars, mainly Chevrolet Cobalts and Saturn Ions, are fine to drive as long as nothing is placed on the key chain.

Barra said many details Congress is seeking will come out in

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Car, Truck Sales a Surprise with Strong Finish in March

By DEE-ANN DURBIN
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) – U.S. auto sales went out like a lion in March.

Automakers said new car and truck sales picked up speed halfway through the month, culminating in a strong final week-end.

The month saw some big gainers. Chrysler's sales rose 13 percent on demand for Ram pickups and the new Jeep Cherokee SUV.

GM sales were up 4 percent with Encore, Regal and SRX leading the way.

Ford sales rose 3 percent, with a 5 percent gain for the F-Series pickup compensating for lower car sales.

March sales helped rescue what was otherwise a disappointing first quarter. Analysts had predicted flat growth for the first three months of this year after harsh weather in January and February hurt sales.

The surprisingly strong March results could help the first quarter pull off a sales increase, but it's not likely to top the 6 percent increase that the industry saw during the same period in 2013.

Jesse Toprak, the chief analyst for the car-buying site Cars.com, said the fundamentals that helped the industry rebound from the recession remain the same. Low interest rates, declining unemployment and attractive new vehicles will continue to bring buyers into showrooms.

But they won't be buying at the same pace. Since 2010, U.S. sales have grown an average of 10 percent each year, but they're now reaching a natural peak, he said.

"We are certainly transitioning



Orion Assembly employee Peggy Burnside helps GM keep up with demand for the Sonic as March sales surge.

GM March Sales Rise 4 Percent; Market Share Up

General Motors dealers delivered 256,047 vehicles in the United States in March 2014. Total sales were up 4 percent compared with a year ago. Retail sales were up 7 percent and GM gained retail market share.

Fleet sales were down 5 percent due to a planned reduction in rental deliveries, said GM spokesperson Jim Cain. However, commercial fleet sales were up 5 percent for the fifth consecutive monthly increase.

"Our retail market share was 15.3 percent, up one-tenth of a point," Cain said.

"GM's retail sales, like the

Chrysler Extends Year-Over-Year Sales Increases

Chrysler's March 2014 sales continued the automaker's winning streak.

The company reported U.S. sales of 193,915 units, a 13 percent increase compared with sales in March 2013 (171,606 units), and the group's best March sales since 2007.

The Jeep, Dodge, Ram Truck, and Fiat brands each posted year-over-year sales gains in March compared with the same month a year ago.

The Jeep brand's 47 percent increase was the largest sales gain of any Chrysler Group brand during the month.

Fusion, F-150, MKZ Lead Ford's Boost During March

Ford's U.S. total March sales of 244,167 vehicles are up 3 percent from a year ago.

Retail sales of 166,030 vehicles are up 3 percent and represent the best March result in eight years.

"March sales turned noticeably higher mid-month and finished strong," said John Felice, Ford vice president, U.S. Marketing, Sales and Service.

"Fusion set an all-time record in March, as overall retail sales in the West continued to expand at the fastest rate in the nation – including California being up 32 percent. F-Series also had a very

SAE Will Feature Ride and Drive At Cobo Apr. 8-10

The three-day 2014 Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) World Congress comes to the Cobo Center in Detroit April 8.

Keynote speaker for the event is O. Kevin Vincent, chief counsel of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, who will kick off the session in Cobo's Grand Riverview Ballroom B at 8:30 a.m.

Other keynote speakers include Dr. Peter Phelps of the Institute for Mobility Research, BMW Group, who's scheduled for Wednesday, April 9, at 9 a.m. in the Grand Riverview Ballroom. B. Myles Kovacs, founder of *DUB Magazine*, will speak on Thursday, April 10, at 9 a.m.

This year's Congress presents attendees with the opportunity to go to professional development seminars and attend the SAE's Career Fair.

Ride-and-drive opportunities will be available for those interested in trying out the latest in automotive technology. Vehicles available include the 2014 Ford Fusion Plug-In, the 2014 Jeep Grand Cherokee Summit Diesel and the 2014 Hyundai Tucson FCEV.

The event will also give companies seeking automotive engineering professionals an opportunity to meet with prospective candidates, said SAE spokesperson Shawn Andreassi. The Career Fair will be held at Cobo Center April 8 from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and April 9 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the SAE World Congress in Detroit.

For more information on the three-day event, go to SAE.org/congress.

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Chrysler Recalling SUVs for Possible Brake Problems

DETROIT (AP) – Chrysler is recalling nearly 870,000 SUVs because corrosion may make the vehicles’ brakes harder to use.

Jeep Grand Cherokee and Dodge Durango SUVs from the 2011 through 2014 model years are involved.

Chrysler says crimp joints in the brake boosters can corrode if they’re exposed to water. If the water freezes, the boosters won’t aid braking as they usually do.

Chrysler began investigating after some customers said their brakes felt too firm when pressed down. The company knows of one accident, but no injuries, due to the defect.

Dealers will install a shield to protect the boosters for free and replace boosters that aren’t working properly.

Chrysler has since changed the design to make the boosters more corrosion-resistant.

Chrysler will notify owners of the recall, which involves 867,795 vehicles.

Tesla Voluntarily Recalls Vehicles

DETROIT (AP) – Electric car manufacturer Tesla Motors says it will install additional shielding to prevent roadway debris from damaging batteries and possibly causing a fire.

The company says it will retrofit the Model S with an aluminum bar, a titanium plate and another piece of aluminum. The shields are designed to ward off the type of debris that caused fires in two cars last year. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began investigating after the fires were reported.

Senators Fire Aggressive Questions at GM CEO Barra at Recall Investigation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

an internal GM investigation that should be completed in 45 to 60 days. She also tried to assure lawmakers that GM is now more focused on safety and the consumer. Many senators were disappointed and not convinced.

The questioning from the Senators was more aggressive, with many focused on the ignition switch, namely how GM approved a replacement in 2006 but never changed the part number.

Failing to change the part number makes the part harder to track. Anyone investigating the cars wouldn’t know why earlier switches were failing at a higher rate than later ones.

While Barra called the failure to change the part number “unacceptable,” several members of the panel implied that it was done intentionally by a person or group within the company, and raised the possibility the action could constitute a criminal violation.

“I don’t see this as anything

but criminal,” insisted Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., a former prosecutor.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., told Barra that the more he hears and sees about GM, “the more convinced I am that GM has a real exposure to criminal liability. I think it’s likely and appropriate that GM will face prosecution.”

The Justice Department is conducting a criminal investigation of GM’s handling of the recall. Barra promised the company will cooperate with the probe.

Barra said the company has not yet fired any employees in connection with the recall. But she said if inappropriate decisions were made, GM will take action, including terminating those involved.

As she began her testimony, Barra faced an angry and skeptical Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., the head of the subcommittee, who recounted the story of a woman who died in an accident involving a faulty switch.

McCaskill said GM had “a cor-

porate culture that chose to conceal rather than disclose.”

McCaskill also dismissed Barra’s claim that there is a new culture at GM. She said that emerging from bankruptcy in 2009, GM had ample time to recall cars equipped with the faulty ignition switch.

GM only began recalling the cars in February.

Blumenthal, who has already submitted a bill that would require the government to make accident reports public, said GM should immediately tell drivers who own the recalled cars not to drive them until they’re repaired because they’re unsafe.

GM has said the ignition switch can move from the “run” position to the “accessory” position because of weight on the key chain. That causes the engine to stall, cutting off power steering and power brakes, and deactivating the front air bags.

GM plans to begin repairing the cars this month, but has said it might take until October to get them all fixed.



Mary Barra

Barra said GM has already provided 13,000 loaner cars to drivers who are concerned.

But she also said that the company’s testing, on different road surfaces, shows the cars are safe as long as there is nothing but the key on the key chain.

Confirming her belief in that claim, Barra said, “I would allow my son and daughter – well, my son, because he’s the only one eligible to drive – if he only had the ignition key.”

‘She Didn’t Make Mistakes’ – Expert on Barra Testimony

By PAUL WISEMAN and DEE-ANN DURBIN
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) – General Motors CEO Mary Barra didn’t squirm on the hot seat last week.

On the job less than three months, she calmly answered or deflected tough questions from a congressional committee about faulty parts responsible for at least 13 deaths and the recall of 2.6 million cars.

Barra frustrated lawmakers by fending off questions, saying she was awaiting the results of an internal GM investigation. She didn’t know why GM waited more than a decade to recall cars it knew had defective ignition switches. She didn’t know who was responsible for the decisions that delayed the recall.

But experts on corporate damage control said she didn’t have much choice and gave her high marks for her performance on the hot seat.

“Barra’s rope-a-dope is the best of GM’s bad options today,” said Washington crisis management consultant Eric Dezenhall. “There isn’t a corporate lawyer in the country that’s going to allow her to engage in freelance speculation about things she

doesn’t know yet. No, that’s not satisfying to the public and media, but the alternative is much worse.”

Investors shrugged. General Motors Co. stock, down more than 7 percent since March 11, barely budged after the hearing, slipping 8 cents to \$34.34.

Barra apologized for GM’s slowness in warning customers about the problems and promised to change the automaker’s culture to put a new emphasis on safety.

“Barra held her ground, claiming that today’s General Motors is a different company from the one whose corporate culture allowed this issue to fester for a decade,” said Jack Nerad, executive editorial director of *Kelley Blue Book*, which lists the prices and values of new and used cars.

Congressional appearances can be a minefield for CEOs. In 2008, automaker CEOs drew public scorn for flying corporate jets to Washington to ask for a government bailout. And Wall Street CEOs were battered in hearings after the financial crisis.

But some lawmakers appeared somewhat more sympathetic to Barra, who was thrust into a crisis after becoming the first woman CEO of a major automaker in January.

In 33 years at GM, Barra worked in engineering, communications and human resources. She’s a second-generation GM employee: Her father was a GM die maker for four decades.

Not everything went smoothly for the new CEO last week, who flew commercial to the hearing.

Barra struggled to explain how GM could continue to use parts that didn’t meet its own specifications. When she tried to draw a distinction between parts that didn’t meet specs and those that were defective and dangerous, Republican Rep. Joe Barton said: “What you just answered is gobbledegook.”

Dan Hill, president of a Washington firm that advises clients on public relations and crisis management, said Barra erred by contrasting today’s safety-conscious GM with the belt-tightening GM that sought bankruptcy protection in 2009.

“Barra threw the old GM under the bus by saying that the previous company that she grew up in and held executive positions in was based on a ‘cost culture’ as opposed to a ‘customer first’ culture,” Hill said, noting that the implicit criticism of her predecessors could be used as ammunition in lawsuits against GM.

But some corporate image experts praised Barra for seizing the initiative by announcing that GM has hired Kenneth Feinberg – who handled the fund for the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Boston Marathon bombing and the BP oil spill – to explore ways to compensate victims of accidents in the GM cars. Barra didn’t commit GM to setting up such a fund.

“She didn’t make mistakes,” says Gene Grabowski, a crisis management consultant who helps executives prepare for congressional testimony.

“That’s how you survive a hearing.”

Durbin reported from Detroit. AP Business Writer Marcy Gordon in Washington contributed to this story.

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Technology Refreshes 2015 Cadillac Escalade

GM is on a roll with its Cadillac brand, and the Escalade is the latest model to go through an update.

From its introduction in 1999, said Cadillac spokesperson Jordana Strosberg, the Cadillac Escalade “quickly became the standard among luxury SUVs with a formula of bold design, powerful capability and luxurious accommodations.

“The all-new 2015 Escalade takes design and technical elements from Cadillac’s product expansion to elevate the brand’s signature SUV.”

“We hadn’t refreshed the Escalade in eight years,” Strosberg said. “Now we have, and the interior of the Escalade has been harmonized with the rest of our Cadillac line. It’s been updated with the latest technology.

“If you’re touching something that feels like leather, it’s leather and it’s been hand-sewn. If you’re touching something that feels like metal, it’s metal. We use real wood. There’s no plastic and there’s no synthetics.”

The fourth-generation Escalade has a new exterior design as well, yet is instantly recognizable, Strosberg said.

“Cadillac’s ongoing growth provides the ideal stage for the all-new Escalade to take a major step forward,” said Uwe Ellinghaus, chief marketing officer, Global Cadillac.

“Escalade has always had a bold character, differentiating itself from other luxury SUVs. Now, Escalade adds more sophistication, with advanced technology and hand-tailored craftsmanship.”

The product line includes the standard Escalade and the ex-

tended-length ESV edition, which offers a 14-inch-longer wheelbase and approximately 20 inches more in overall length, maximizing space for third-row passengers and nearly double the cargo space behind the third-row seat, Strosberg said.

Luxury and Premium collections are also available, offering higher levels of content and technology, Strosberg said. All models are offered with 2WD and 4WD drivetrains as well as a new 6.2L V8 engine that is more powerful and more efficient than previous models.

“In fact, the new V8 is powerful enough to enable 0 to 60 mph performance in less than 6 seconds – 5.96 seconds for Escalade 4WD and 5.98 seconds for Escalade ESV 2WD,” Strosberg said.

The new 6.2L engine also delivers an EPA-estimated 21 mpg on the highway (Escalade 2WD/4WD and Escalade ESV 2WD).

“That’s about 17 percent greater efficiency on the highway than previous models, and also about 17 percent greater efficiency than Mercedes-Benz GL550’s 18 mpg and nearly 24 percent greater than Lexus LX 570’s 17 mpg,” Strosberg said.

Cadillac’s Magnetic Ride Control suspension system is standard, Strosberg said, adding that it’s designed to deliver precisely controlled driving performance.

“At its core, Escalade is an SUV with full-size truck capabilities, enabling a trailering rating of 8,300 pounds on the standard model and 8,100 pounds on Escalade ESV,” Strosberg said.

“That’s more than Mercedes-Benz GL550’s 7,800 pounds, Lexus LX 570’s 7,000 pounds and

Land Rover Range Rover’s 7,716 pounds.”

“At a glance, it is undeniably and unmistakably a Cadillac Escalade,” said Bob Boniface, Cadillac exterior design director. “It is powerful in size and presence with integrated technologies that push its design to the leading edge.”

Eric Clough, director of design, Cadillac Interiors, said, “An exceptional level of craftsmanship is found in the 2015 Escalade, and it all centers on the premium, layered materials and extensive use of cut-and-sew live stitching – the way fine furniture is produced.

“We designed Escalade with what we call the beauty of contrast – a distinctive combination of bold, SUV character, but also the refinement of the Cadillac form vocabulary and technology.”

Technology is integral to the Escalade’s driving experience, Strosberg said. New and enhanced features help make what already was one of the industry’s most-connected vehicles more intuitive, she said.

CUE – Cadillac User Experience – is standard. It is an advanced system for connectivity and control, featuring state-of-the-art voice recognition with touch controls common with the world’s most popular tablets and mobile devices.

The eight-inch center screen uses capacitive touch technology and gesture recognition, en-



Hand-stitching for 2015 Escalade

abling tapping and swiping common to smartphones and tablets.

All this would be nothing without great performance, Strosberg said. The Escalade performance advances, she said, with an all-new, more powerful and more efficient 6.2L V8 engine rated at an SAE-certified 420 horsepower and 460 lb.-ft. of torque – a nearly 5 percent increase in horsepower and 10 percent more torque.

The greater torque delivers an enhanced feeling of power on demand and greater confidence when trailering, said Strosberg.

Warren Library Lends Gleaners Helping Hand

Next time you stop by the library to get something to read, considering bringing something along to help those in need as well.

All Warren Public Library locations will be collecting donations of nonperishable food items as part of the Food for Thought campaign, a regional effort between local libraries and Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeast Michigan. The collection will continue until Wednesday, April 30.

Food banks see a decrease in inventory during the winter and early spring, so donations are needed to help feed hungry children, seniors, and families in the community, said librarian Kathleen Faba. To participate, bring in nonperishable food items and place them in donation boxes inside the library. For more information, call 586-574-4564.

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TRW System Designed to Keep Drivers Safe and Seated

TRW Automotive Holdings Corp. is producing its second-generation Active Control Retractor system (ACR2), which is being used in the 2014 Cadillac CTS.

This is the first launch of this advanced seat belt technology in North America, said TRW spokesperson John Wilkerson. The system combines active and passive approaches to offer enhanced safety, comfort and convenience to vehicle occupants.

Uwe Class, senior manager of mechatronic systems for TRW's Occupant Safety Systems, said "ACR2 is designed to use braking and stability control sensor information to recognize critical situations before a potential accident. "It reacts by helping to secure the driver and passenger by removing seat belt slack – so the occupant position is improved in advance of an impending crash.

"The system also offers additional convenience features such as slack removal after the belt is buckled."

Additionally, the ACR2 provides dynamic driving support, developed to help keep the driver in a more stable position in the seat during highly dynamic situations and during rapid deceleration. This feature is an advanced version of TRW's proprietary situation management algorithm.

"The ACR2 situation management algorithm continuously processes signals from the vehicle's relevant dynamic systems such as ABS, electronic stability control, radar or camera systems," continued Class.

"The algorithm evaluates events such as braking, sliding or vehicle angle, and if a critical situation is



TRW's ACR2 for 2014 Cadillac CTS

identified, the ACR system pretensions the seat belt, helping place the occupant in a better position for a potential crash and acting as a warning to the driver that an accident may occur. Should the accident be avoided, the system automatically resets itself via the reversible actuator."

Peter Lake, TRW Automotive's executive vice president of Sales and Business Development, said, "We are pleased to bring this important safety advancement to the North American market through close collaboration with General Motors.

"The latest-generation ACR2 system represents enhanced safety and convenience features at a more affordable cost."

TRW was first to market with an active seat belt system in 2002, said TRW spokesman John Wilkerson, and has continued to work to integrate the Active Control Retractor system with other advanced comfort and safety systems, including drowsy driver warning functions and interaction with radar-enabled automatic emergency braking technology.

UAW Rebuilding Its Membership, Now Seeking Non-Automotive Employees

NEW YORK (AP) – The United Auto Workers membership grew by nearly 9,000 people last year, the union said in a filing with the Department of Labor, the fourth-straight year that the union has rebuilt its depleted ranks.

The UAW's due-paying membership now stands at 391,415, compared with 382,513 in 2012. The UAW hit a low of 355,191 in 2009, the year when both General Motors and Chrysler filed for bankruptcy.

The Detroit Three may have mostly recovered from the industry's nadir five years ago, but the UAW still faces many challenges. The UAW had roughly 1.5 million members in 1979 at its peak.

Annual dues collected by the UAW, the union's main source of income, have fallen more than 40 percent from 2006 to 2013. However, the drop appears to have stabilized this year, as total dues in 2013 were \$115.1 million, up slightly from \$115 million in 2012.

The union also failed in February to rally enough worker support to organize Volkswagen's factory in Chattanooga, Tenn.,

even with the passive support of VW management.

The VW plant was considered a major test for the union to push its membership into the South, where several domestic and foreign automakers have been opening up factories.

To bolster its ranks, the UAW has been increasingly pushing to organize workers in non-automotive industries. The UAW said it organized casinos in Ohio and Las Vegas and was able to organize the graduate student employees of New York University.

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weather and the economy as a whole, have been on an improving trend since early February," said Kurt McNeil, U.S. vice president of Sales Operations.

"We expect to see solid economic growth in the months ahead, with the job market, household income and consumer spending all showing positive signs. It is a strong backdrop for the launch of our all-new heavy-duty pickups, large SUVs and other new products, like the Cadillac ATS coupe coming this summer."

"Our dealers continue to work hard to exceed people's expectations for customer care, whether they are shopping for one of our award-winning new products or coming in to have their vehicle serviced," he said.

Cain said March retail sales highlights compared with the same time in 2013 showed deliveries of the Chevrolet Silverado – the 2014 North American Truck of the Year – were up 14 percent and the GMC Sierra was up 23 percent.

Deliveries of Chevrolet passenger cars were up 10 percent, Cain said. The Spark was up 17 percent; Sonic was up 20 percent; Volt 7 percent; Impala 103 percent; and the Corvette – the 2014 North American Car of the Year – was up 221 percent.

Deliveries of the Cadillac SRX rose 37 percent, Cain said. In addition, the CTS family was up 11

Fusion, F-150, MKZ Lead Ford's Boost In March Sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

strong month, as did Lincoln MKZ."

Ford F-Series truck sales reached 70,940. During the last seven years, F-Series has surpassed the monthly 70,000 truck mark only four times.

Last month marks F-Series' highest March sales volume since 2008.

"Based on Polk retail registration data, we have seen the half-ton V6 pickup truck segment grow 600 percent over the last three years," said Ford Sales Analyst Erich Merkle.

"F-150 is responsible for 91 percent of that growth and this provides F-150 with 78 percent share of the V6 half-ton pickup segment."

Lincoln MKZ sales of 4,052 vehicles are up 72 percent, setting an all-time monthly sales record. The strong performance of MKZ drove overall Lincoln sales to a 31 percent increase in March, the sixth straight month of sales gains. During the last six months, Lincoln has increased sales 27 percent with 43,445 vehicles sold.

"Lincoln still has a long way to go, but we're very pleased with the fact that MKZ had its best sales month ever in the month of March. Since its launch in late 2005, it beat every month with over 4,000 MKZs sold," Merkle said.

Ford Fusion sales of 32,963 vehicles were the most since the vehicle was introduced in 2005. The Western region of the U.S. continues to drive Fusion retail sales higher, including a 22 percent increase in March.

"We sold almost 33,000 Fusions in March, and that was up 9 percent over a year ago," said Merkle. "Where we saw the greatest growth was in places like the West, where retail sales growth was at the fastest rate – about 22 percent in March year-over-year."

percent on the strength of the new 2014 CTS sedan, which is the 2014 *Motor Trend* Car of the Year.

Sales of the Buick Regal were up 52 percent and the Encore up 71 percent.

Sales of large SUVs increased 62 percent, with availability of the new 2015 models building, per plan, Cain said.

GM's incentives as a percentage of average transaction prices, or ATPs, were 10 percent compared with 10.3 percent for the industry, according to J.D. Power PIN estimates through March 23. That's down from February and year over year.

GM's ATPs set a record of about \$34,000, up about \$2,000 per unit from February and more than \$3,800 from a year ago.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from a market that was in hyper-recovery mode to a mature market where double-digit gains will be increasingly difficult to attain," Toprak said.

Based on the first quarter, Toprak lowered his full-year U.S. sales forecast to 16.1 million vehicles from 16.5 million. The industry sold 15.6 million cars and trucks in 2013.

LMC Automotive, a data firm, also lowered its annual sales forecast, to 16.1 million vehicles from 16.2 million.

Others said improving weather and increases in incentives should boost sales as spring progresses. Weaker-than-expected sales in January and February caused cars to pile up on dealer lots, and automakers will likely offer more deals to get them sold.

"The momentum built in March should set the market up for a big month in April," said Alec Gutierrez, a senior analyst with *Kelley Blue Book*.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We are entering the spring selling season on a high note as our Jeep and Fiat brands recorded their best sales months ever and Chrysler Group extended its streak in March to 48 consecutive months of year-over-year sales increases," said Reid Bigland, head of U.S. Sales. "Our Ram pickup truck posted its best March sales in 10 years."

Six Chrysler Group vehicles set sales records in March. The Jeep Compass and Jeep Patriot, the Fiat 500L, and the Dodge Journey mid-size crossover each posted their best monthly sales ever, Kisiel said.

The Jeep Wrangler and Ram Cargo Van each recorded their best sales for the month of March, Kisiel said.

With its 27 percent increase, the Dodge Grand Caravan had the largest year-over-year percentage sales increase of any Chrysler models in March. Ram pickup truck sales increased 26 percent. The new Jeep Cherokee mid-size SUV weighed in with its second-best sales month since arriving in dealerships in October.

This wasn't the only good news for Chrysler. Durango sales were up 22 percent in March, extending its run of year-over-year sales gains to 17 consecutive months.



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IIHS Names Malibu ‘Top Safety Pick-Plus’

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

alert if it senses a possible collision.

The IIHS designs its tests to replicate certain types of crashes that can occur on the road, with evaluation focusing on key points in the vehicle’s body structure and the risk of occupant injury.

For instance, the Side Impact Crashworthiness Evaluation Crash Test consists of rolling a 3,300-pound sled into the side of a test vehicle at 31.1 mph. The IIHS specifically aligns the sled with the driver’s head.

Similarly, in the Moderate Overlap Frontal Crashworthiness Evaluation Crash Test, the test vehicle runs into a wall offset from the vehicle’s center line.

“We are very pleased that the IIHS has recognized the safety of the Malibu with this prestigious rating,” said Gay Kent, general director of General Motors Vehicle Safety and Crashworthiness.

U-D, U-M Students Recognized for Energy Efficiency

DETROIT (AP) – Mayor Mike Duggan and Shell oil company are scheduled to recognize students from the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor who are building energy-efficient vehicles as part of a global competition.

Shell officials said the students test drove their built-from-scratch ultra-fuel-efficient vehicles last week at Cobo Center in downtown Detroit.

They will compete in late April in the Shell Eco-marathon Americas 2014 in Houston. Last year’s winner recorded 3,587 miles on one gallon of gasoline.

“Customer safety is our guiding compass; this serves as a testament to that.”

The Chevrolet Malibu has been a Top Safety Pick for the past four years, but 2014 is the first time it is a Top Safety Pick-Plus. It is the second Chevrolet car to receive the top rating, following the Spark mini car.

And while this is good news for GM, the impact on the public will likely be small, said David Johnson, president of the PR firm Strategic Visions out of Atlanta.

“Your general consumer would look at this announcement with a great deal of skepticism,” Johnson said. “That’s if the consumer was even paying attention to the story, which I doubt. Many people would see the timing of the IIHS announcement as suspicious.”

The problem, Johnson said, is that many people don’t understand

that the IIHS has no connection with GM or that the results from its studies are neutral.

As to the larger question of how GM will rebrand itself, Johnson said that the company should get everything out in the open right away, rather than suffer from the “death of a thousand cuts.”

“If there is anything out there that contradicts what Mary Barra has been saying, they have to throw her over,” Johnson said. “But I doubt there is anything out there that would contradict her.”

“Right now, people are giving her the benefit of the doubt. If some sort of contradiction were to come to light, not only would the company be seen as incompetent because of the troubles, the new administration would be seen as liars, and the consequences of that would be terrible.”

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Look...It's a Boat, It's a Car...It's a Supercar, the Gibbs Sports Quadski

by Jim Stickford

Gibbs Sports Amphibians, founded by an Englishman and a New Zealander, set up shop in Auburn Hills because metro Detroit was one of the few places in the world that had everything the young company needed.

Gibbs spokesperson Graham Jenkins said Gibbs Sports Amphibians makes vehicles that operate as well on the water as on the road. The original idea came from New Zealand industrialist Alan Gibbs in the mid-1990s.

"Alan Gibbs is a keen boater," Jenkins said. "There is a place in New Zealand called Kaipara Harbor. The tide goes out as much as a mile during low tide. He saw there was a real need for a boat that can launch and recover itself under such conditions."

Gibbs then set about to create a vehicle that would do just that, Jenkins said.

When English aerospace engineer Neil Jenkins heard about Gibbs' work, he decided to check it out.

"He was ravished by what he saw," Jenkins said. "Neil is my father and he always enjoyed cutting-edge technology and what he saw was something he had never seen before."

Jenkins said one thing his father brought to the table was a new perspective. He noted that most engineers don't so much create something new as refine something that always existed.

It was Jenkins who suggested that they use composite materials for the hull. That would make the vehicle lighter without sacrificing structural strength.

The two men joined forces and Gibbs Sports Amphibians was created. Much of the research and development was done in Britain, where they spent many years working on their designs, and by 2012, they were ready to put one of their prototypes – the Quadski – into production.

The question became where to build their factory. The answer was metro Detroit.

"We chose the Detroit region, specifically Auburn Hills, because, believe it or not, there aren't many places in the world that had everything we needed," Jenkins said.

Among the things that set Detroit apart was its infrastructure. The area has a large harbor, rail and highway connections, as well as all the suppliers any manufacturer would need.

"We're talking auto suppliers, but auto suppliers have the experience and expertise to make what we need," Jenkins said. "And the area has people with the skills that we need to assemble our products."

And that's important, Jenkins said. Having people who are experts in setting up the manufacturing processes needed to move a product from prototype to production counts.

"With a prototype, you might have a dozen technicians working on the concept," Jenkins said. "But developing a manufacturing process that is efficient that can produce that concept on an industrial scale is almost as difficult as coming up with a working prototype."

Jenkins said the biggest surprise when they were considering setting up shop was how friendly and helpful people were.

"When we were looking at Detroit there was such a warm and supportive atmosphere," Jenkins said. "That was a bit of change from Britain, where people are more reserved. We had a lot of people willing to work with us. I think that's because here people realize that manufacturing is still a good way to generate wealth, even in the face of competition from places like China."

"Remember, Detroit was once the wealthiest city in the world

based on the strength of its manufacturing prowess. People around here still remember that and realize the importance of manufacturing."

Jenkins said they started considering metro Detroit in early 2012. So when the company announced it was setting up shop in Auburn Hills in September of that year, a lot of the work had already been done. That's why they were able to produce their first Quadskis by January 2013.

"We didn't reach high production levels until about August of 2013," Jenkins said. "Next for us is a vehicle we're calling the Humdinger. It looks sort of like an off-road truck. We're working with one of our licensees on it. The Humdinger should be out in the next couple of years."

The company received a boost in publicity earlier this year

when the BBC television show, "Top Gear," featured a race in and around Lake Como in Italy between host Jeremy Clark, who drove a Gibbs on land and water and co-host Richard Hammond who drove a car on a land-only route. Clark won the race.

About 150 people work in the Auburn Hills plant, Jenkins said. They are looking for production associates with experience who can work on an assembly line and produce quality work.

"We have a strong engineering team," Jenkins said. "We're looking for people with a wider perspective than your average Big Three engineer."

Ultimately, Jenkins said, Gibbs Sports Amphibians has been successful because they think outside the box.

In the past, other companies have done a good job of creating



With tires folded up, the Quadski seemingly flies through the water.

a machine that can be a road vehicle as well as a water vehicle.

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goes from land to water in five seconds at the press of a button. These other machines took 30 minutes.

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