

Chevrolet Emphasizes Corvette's Racing Heritage, Citing 50 Years of Track Experience

Historically, the Corvette has been known as an American car for the American market. But over the past few years, Chevrolet has been working hard to change the minds of people around the world.

That's what made the Geneva Auto Show the perfect place to unveil the new 2017 Corvette Grand Sport on March 1.

This Corvette has racing in its DNA, and is a pure expression of the car's motorsports-bred pedigree, said Chevy spokesman Monte Doran.

Like the 2015 Le Mans-winning Corvette C7.R GTE Pro race car, the new Grand Sport combines a lightweight architecture, a track-honed aerodynamics package, Michelin tires and a naturally aspirated engine, Doran said, adding that it offers an estimated 1.05g in cornering capability – and up to 1.2g with the available Z07 package.

The vehicle has heritage-inspired design cues and exclusive features that acknowledge the historic Grand Sport legacy, established in 1963 to take on the world's best sports cars, Doran said. Only five were built before a corporate decision suspending direct motorsports involvement ended the project.

"Racing has been part of Corvette's essence for more than 50 years and that track experience has helped us build better, more capable cars," said Mark Reuss, executive vice president of Global Product Development and Global Purchasing and Supply Chain.

"The global acclaim for the seventh-generation Corvette vali-

dates that direct link and the 2017 Grand Sport takes its track-bred technology to a new, exciting threshold."

The Corvette Grand Sport coupe and convertible go on sale this summer in the U.S. and in the fall in Europe, Doran said.

Engineers adapted the chassis

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



Chad Jeuchter introduces 2017 Corvette Grand Sport in Geneva.



Jeep Renegade steals scene from upcoming Batman/Superman movie.

'Holy Jeep Renegade, Batman' – Chrysler Vehicle Hits Movies

Batman came to Detroit and Jeep got him.

Fiat Chrysler and Warner Bros. Pictures joined forces in a special co-branded partnership to mark the premiere of the highly anticipated debut of "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" (opening nationwide in theaters on March 25).

This alliance includes the introduction of the new 2016 Jeep Renegade "Dawn of Justice Special Edition" (available now in dealerships across the country), in addition to branded television

spots with the Jeep and Dodge brands, and social/digital extensions creating consumer engagement leading up to the film's premiere next month, said Fiat Chrysler spokeswoman Eileen Wunderlich.

"Thanks to an extensive brand and product portfolio, we were able to address every automobile need for the movie including Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler, Fiat, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, and from our sister company CNH Indus-

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February's U.S. Vehicle Sales Best in 16 Years

Ford, Chrysler Sales Up, GM Down with Increased Jobs, Lower Interest Rates

DETROIT (AP) – Automakers posted big U.S. sales gains last month as consumers – giddy from Super Bowl ads – returned to showrooms after a snowy January.

Ford's sales rose 20 percent over last February, boosted in part by higher sales to rental car

fleets. Fiat Chrysler's rose 12 percent.

General Motors said its sales fell 1.5 percent, partly due to a 39 percent cut in rental sales. Volkswagen, still stinging from its diesel cheating scandal, saw its U.S. sales drop 13 percent.

Consulting firm LMC Auto-

motive predicts an 8.1 percent increase over a year ago to 1.36 million new vehicles. With an annual selling rate of 17.7 million cars and trucks, last month would be the best February in 16 years. Automakers reported monthly sales figures on March 1.

Industry analysts had expected February sales to bounce back after a slight decline in January. One factor: Super Bowl ads.

On Super Bowl Sunday, Feb. 7, website visits per dealership were four times higher than any other Sunday in all of 2015, according to Michelle Krebs, a senior analyst with Autotrader.com. Credit applications also hit single-day records last month.

Ford Chief Economist Emily Kolinski Morris said improving job and income growth, as well as low gas prices and low interest rates, are outweighing stock

market volatility in consumers' minds. Buyers are confident, which is key for auto sales.

Proof of that confidence is everywhere. Sales of the Cadillac Escalade, an SUV that starts at \$73,000, were up 22 percent over last February. Sales of Nissan's \$30,000 Murano SUV nearly doubled; so did sales of the \$89,000 Lexus LX SUV. Ford said it was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



A driverless Google car parked after catching a bus – with its bumper.

Autonom-ooops Car Crashes

by JUSTIN PRITCHARD
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) – A self-driving car being tested by Google struck a public bus on a Silicon Valley street, a fender-bender that appears to be the first time one of the tech company's vehi-

cles caused a crash during testing.

Google accepted at least some responsibility for the collision, which occurred on Valentine's Day when one of the Lexus SUVs it has outfitted with sensors and

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'My Car Does What?' Explains Safety Tech

by Jim Stickford

While automakers are adding more safety technology to vehicles than ever, it won't do any good if drivers don't understand the tech and how it works.

That's how Deborah Hersman described the reason for a new public service campaign.

The National Safety Council (NSC), in conjunction with the University of Iowa, launched the new public service campaign at a March 1 Automotive Press Association event at the Detroit Athletic Club.

The campaign, titled, "My Car Does What?" is needed, said Hersman, NSC president, because today's vehicles are more complicated than ever. Plus, said Hersman, a surprising number of drivers don't know everything about the safety technology in their cars. This ignorance, she said, can be fatal.

"I think vehicle safety technology is slated to be a huge game changer," Hersman said. "Some of this technology is fantastic. Things like parallel parking assist. But, to be honest, I don't

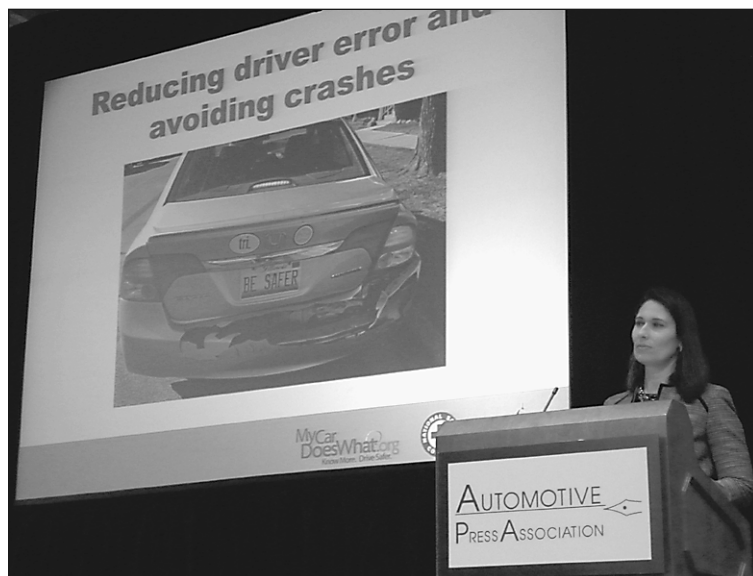
know of anyone killed because of a parallel parking accident."

The causes of most fatal accidents have been known for decades, Hersman said. It's human error. She noted that every car that comes off the assembly line has been built with the idea that the driver can be responsi-

ble for a fatal accident.

"People are human and to be human means getting tired, getting distracted," Hersman said. "The good news is that new technologies can make up for our humanness. If car crashes are a disease,

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Deborah Hersman discusses new automotive safety technology.

Detroit Auto Scene

31201 Chicago Road South
Warren, Michigan 48093

586-939-6800

Contact us:
Info@DetroitAutoScene.com

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William Springer II, publisher
Lisa A. Torretta, operations
Jim Stickford, news

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Corvette Debuts New Model at Geneva Show

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tuning, and upgraded cooling systems and performance technologies of the Corvette Z06 to give the new Grand Sport capability commensurate with its racing-derived history, he said.

"We didn't hold back with the new Grand Sport," said Tadge Juechter, Corvette chief engineer. "For the first time, buyers can equip the Grand Sport with a Z07 performance package – which adds carbon-ceramic brakes, Michelin Sport Cup 2 summer tires, and carbon-fiber aero package that delivers true downforce."

The result, Juechter said, is a potent track car. In fact, the Grand Sport with the Z07 package is less than one second off the track record for the previous-generation Corvette ZR1 on the road course at GM's Milford Proving Ground.

Content highlights for Grand Sport include:

- Michelin Pilot Super Sport summer tires: 285/30ZR19 (front) and 335/25ZR20 (rear);
- Specific Grand Sport wheel design: 19x10 inches (front) and 20x12 inches (rear);
- Brembo brake system with (355 mm) 14-inch rotors and six-piston calipers in front and (340 mm) 13.4-inch rotors and four-piston calipers in the rear;
- Standard magnetic ride control, specific stabilizer bars and unique springs;
- Standard electronic limited-slip differential;
- LT1 V8 engine rated at (343 kW) 460 hp, with dry-sump oiling system and active exhaust;
- Seven-speed manual transmission with active rev match and available eight-speed paddle-shift automatic with specific performance calibration;
- Available Z07 package adds carbon ceramic-matrix brakes and Michelin Pilot Sport 2 Cup tires.

In addition to track-focused aero elements, the Grand Sport also features specific front fender inserts, a Z06-style grille and wider rear fenders – a distinctive design package that gives the car a track-ready attitude, Doran said.

Grand Sport models are offered with the Stingray's full exterior and interior color palette, Doran said.

An available Heritage package includes hash-mark fender graphics in six colors, with the hash-mark detail carried onto the interior's brushed aluminum trim. Full-length stripes are also offered.

"The choices are almost endless," said Harlan Charles, Corvette product marketing manager. "The packages take personalization to an unprecedented level, enabling customers to create their own Corvette Grand Sport statement like no other."

The Collector Edition will be offered later in the model year in the U.S. and Europe, Doran said.

Supplier Jenoptik to Expand, Add Jobs in Rochester Hills

by Jim Stickford

Looks like auto supplier Jenoptik is here to stay in Rochester Hills.

The manufacturer and system provider for high-precision, contact and non-contact production metrology and laser cutting has been operating in Rochester Hills since 2007, said the city's Mayor Bryan Barnett.

Executives at Jenoptik on Feb. 26 at a press conference in Rochester Hills unveiled plans to build a 100,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Michigan Technical Campus on the site.

"We've been working with the company for more than a year," Barnett said. "They've been here since '07. So when they let us know that they were interested in growing, we immediately started looking for property for them that would meet their needs."

"We not only wanted to keep Jenoptik in Rochester Hills, we wanted to help them expand."

Right now, Barnett said, the company employs about 80 people in the city. Their plans for expansion call for immediately increasing that number to 150. Jenoptik's five-year plan, Barnett said, is to increase employment to a level of 400 to 500 people.

"Jenoptik is a pretty steady company," Barnett said. "In the past, they've shown growth and profits, so we believe that by making this investment in a facility, they will see the growth needed to support this investment."

Fortunately, Barnett said, the city actually owned some property that is ideal for the Jenoptik's purposes.

"Back in the 1990s, there was a company called Letica that had a facility located on Hamlin, between Livernois and Crooks," Barnett said. "They moved to city of Rochester proper. We end-

ed up owning the land and, for a while, there were some plans to perhaps build a school there or have a DPS building."

But, Barnett said, those plans fell through. The total size of the property measured about 20 acres. The city sold off a few acres, but held the last 15 acres while looking for a good partner to develop it.

Jenoptik, Barnett said, paid the city \$2.386 million for the land for their campus.

Barnett said the new technical center is scheduled to be opened in March of 2017, so construction should start very soon.



A rendering of the upcoming Jenoptik Michigan Technical Campus

Automakers Enjoy Brisk February Sales

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the best February for van sales since 1979.

LMC is predicting sales of 17.8 million new vehicles this year, up from 17.46 million last year. But the growth rate is slowing from previous years, and many are expecting a plateau as U.S. demand peaks.

GM said its Chevrolet and GMC brands saw declines in February, but sales improved at Cadillac and Buick. GM's best seller, the Chevrolet Silverado pickup, had a 5 percent sales decline. GM sold 227,825 cars and trucks last month.

GM said it's trying to lower its reliance on rental sales, which are less profitable and can hurt vehicle resale values. The company said its sales to commercial and government fleets are up so far this year, but it has sold 30,000 fewer vehicles to rental fleets. Around 21 percent of the company's February sales went to fleets rather than individual buyers.

It was a different story at Ford.

Its U.S. sales chief, Mark LaNeve, said Ford expects heavier fleet sales in the first four months of this year before they taper off. Thirty-six percent of Ford's U.S. sales went to fleets in February.

LaNeve defended that percentage, which is unusually high. At Toyota, for example, 16.5 percent of February sales went to fleets.

"We like this business. It's profitable for us, and we manage it very well," LaNeve said.

Ford's luxury Lincoln brand saw sales jump 30 percent after sales of its new MKX SUV more than doubled over last February. Sales of Ford's best seller, the F-Series pickup, were up 10 percent. Ford sold a total of 217,192 vehicles.

Fiat Chrysler was led by the Jeep brand and the Ram pickup. Both reported sales increases of 23 percent.

The company's truck sales rose 27 percent, but its car sales fell by the same percentage. Fiat Chrysler sold 149,188 trucks and SUVs last month but only 33,691 cars.

Volkswagen had a few winners. Sales of the Tiguan SUV were up 78 percent, while the German company's electric Golf also saw higher sales.

But the brand's sales will likely continue to fall until it announces a fix for diesels that cheated on U.S. emissions standards. Volkswagen's U.S. sales totaled 22,231 in February.

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FCA's Kristal Fears Named 2016 Black Engineer of Year

Inspired by an elementary school teacher in Detroit, Kristal Fears has worked to reach a place in her career that garners a major award.

U.S. Black Engineer & Information Technology magazine awarded its 2016 Black Engineer of the Year (BEYA) Special Recognition Award to Fears, who is Global Manufacturing Product Responsible, C-SUV Product, at Fiat Chrysler.

Fears was honored at a special recognition breakfast hosted during the 30th BEYA STEM Conference and Career Fair held Feb. 18-20 in Philadelphia. The award honors outstanding leaders in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

Fears joins a long list of Fiat Chrysler technical and engineering leaders whose contributions have been recognized over the years at the BEYA conference and related programs, said Fiat Chrysler spokeswoman Val Oehmke.

"Kristal is a talented engineer with a dynamic leadership style that inspires the people around her and achieves results," said Brian Harlow vice president of Manufacturing, FCA-North America.

"Among her accomplishments, she successfully led the implementation of a Transmission Flash System at our Jefferson North Assembly Plant that achieved significant reductions in cost and part complexity. This innovative project, a first within FCA, is now being implemented across multiple vehicle lines and assembly plants on a global level."

Fears was appointed Global Manufacturing Product Responsible for the C-SUV product in 2014, Oehmke said. This program is industrialized in North America, Latin America and Asia Pacific regions. In this role, she works cross-functionally with engineers to manage tooling, facilities and

equipment budgets and to identify and resolve manufacturing constraints.

Prior to this role, Fears coordinated the manufacturing scope, timing and cost for the new model Jeep Grand Cherokee and Dodge Durango programs from program approval through model launch.

Fears is a member of two employee resource groups at Fiat Chrysler – the Women's Forum and the African American Employee Network.

These groups work to support the career development of members and provide education programs within the company that enhance cultural awareness and understanding, Oehmke said.

Fears has been a volunteer and supporter of the March of Dimes and has supported efforts that enhance education and career development of adolescent girls.

She said her own career path was inspired by the Detroit elementary school teacher who recognized her skills in math and encouraged her to pursue a career in engineering.

"I owe much of who I am and what I've accomplished to the strong people who saw my potential and inspired the choices I've made in my life and career," Fears said.

"I know that it's both my responsibility and privilege to lead people, serve the community and inspire the next generation.

"I'm very appreciative of this recognition of my career accomplishments and look forward to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead."

Fiat Chrysler has a longstanding commitment to recruiting diverse talent and supporting edu-

cation initiatives for minorities in STEM, Oehmke said. For the past three years, Fiat Chrysler has been named a top supporter of engineering programs at the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), according to *U.S. Black Engineer & Information Technology* magazine.

The company also sponsored Great Minds in STEM, an organization that provides scholarships to Hispanic students majoring in a STEM field, Oehmke said.

In addition, FCA US supports various organizations that advance women's involvement in STEM professions, including Michigan Council of Women in Technology and Society of Women Engineers.

In 2014, Oehmke said Fiat Chrysler partnered with Florida International University (FIU) to sponsor a STEM education initiative called "Engineers on Wheels."



Kristal Fears

Staffed by FIU students and overseen by FIU faculty, "Engineers on Wheels" brings engineering education into South Florida's public schools, giving students the opportunity to become familiar with the high-tech, hands-on education they need to prepare for future success in STEM subjects and careers.

Novi Supplier Earns Daimler Quality Award

Preh GmbH, with offices in Novi, was honored by Daimler with an award for the development and manufacture of a new type of multifunction switch, said Preh spokesman Barrett Kalellis.

The touch control buttons are integrated into the steering wheel switches and permit drivers of the current generation of Mercedes-Benz E-Class cars to operate all functions of the combined instrument and central display without taking their hands off the wheel. Christoph Hummel, Preh's president and CEO, and Chief Technology Officer Jochen Ehrenberg received the award in Stuttgart on Feb. 26.

Daimler honors its suppliers that demonstrate top quality, innovation and partnership cooperation of its suppliers. Ten awards were granted this year to suppliers, Kalellis said.

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Continental Buys New Company's Tech Portfolio

Automotive supplier Continental, with its North American headquarters in Auburn Hills, has acquired the Hi-Res 3D Flash LIDAR business from Advanced Scientific Concepts, Inc. (ASC) based in Santa Barbara, California.

The new technology will help Continental's Advanced Driver Assistance Systems product portfolio with a future-oriented solution to add to the group of surrounding sensors needed to achieve fully automated driving, said Continental spokeswoman Kathryn Blackwell.

One significant advantage of the Hi-Res 3D Flash LIDAR sensor technology is that it provides both real-time machine vision as well as environmental mapping functions, Blackwell said.

This tech will help to enable a significantly more detailed and accurate field of vision around the entire vehicle, Blackwell said, independent of day or night time and robust in adverse weather conditions.

Continental is working on a family of sensors to address different requirements around the vehicle to allow function-optimized mapping and segmentation of the entire surrounding area around a vehicle, Blackwell said.

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Jeep Renegade Takes 'Batman' On a Movie Ride

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

trial, Iveco heavy-duty commercial vehicles," said Olivier Francois, chief marketing officer, FCA Global.

"With much of the film's production taking place in our own backyard of Detroit, our ability to creatively collaborate with the WB team reached new heights. The product integration was so organic to the filmmakers' vision and storyline, all we had to do was incorporate scenes from the movie for our commercials."

"Our partnership with Warner Bros. and the highly anticipated 'Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice' film allows us to expose the Jeep Renegade and its best-in-class capability to an incredibly vast audience," said Mike Manley, head of Jeep Brand - FCA Global.

"The new Jeep Renegade 'Dawn of Justice Special Edition' boasts a unique, dark appearance package for the most capable small SUV that we're confident consumers - including millions of moviegoers - will love."

Wunderlich said film partnerships are years in the making. "The commercial actually uses real footage from the movie," he said. "The movie was filmed mostly in Detroit in 2014."

And the vehicle that actor Ben Affleck is driving was provided by Jeep, Wunderlich said. The special edition Renegade couldn't be launched until just before the film is to come out. In this case, March of 2016 - more than a year after the movie completed filming.

Additionally, Wunderlich said, there's a special "Batman v Superman" badge on the right rear of the Jeep Renegade Dawn of Justice Special Edition. She said Fiat Chrysler is not releasing the number of special editions being made.

As part of the partnership, Fiat Chrysler, in addition to the Jeep spot, will be airing a Dodge commercial beginning in Mid-March, Caporali said. And the Jeep brand will have social extensions across Twitter and Instagram.

"There is more to come," Caporali said.

Mopar Drag Team Disappointed by Early NHRA Exits

It was an relatively unusual National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) race day occurrence on Feb. 28 not to see a Hemi-powered Dodge vehicle advance to a final elimination round, but while Mopar drivers in both Funny Car and Pro Stock classes were disappointed by early exits at 32nd annual NHRA Nationals near Phoenix, there was a lot of optimism about the early season progress being made by their teams in their competitive fields.

Coming off a win in the season opening Winter Nationals event, Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) driver Ron Capps earned the No. 1 qualifier position for Sunday's eliminations at Wild Horse Pass Motorsports Park with his tenth sub 4-second pass of the season and a track record time of 3.925 seconds. His Dodge Charger R/T posted another stellar run in the first round of eliminations with a 3.965 second pass at 319.29 mph to beat Jeff Diehl.

Unfortunately, things didn't go quite as planned in the quarterfinals, when Capps' day went up in tire smoke halfway through the run against competitor Tim Wilkerson, who had similar issues in his own lane but regained control for the round win.

Ford Hides Cars from Spies – in Plain Sight

In developing new cars, manufacturers like to keep things under wraps.

The thing about it is that at some point the car has to leave the testing ground and move out into the real world.

And, in an environment of everyone owning cell phones with cameras, it becomes very difficult to keep the vehicles hidden.

No industry is as challenged with keeping its new products under wraps as automakers, which must test their vehicles on public roads, said Ford spokesman Sam Schembari.

So, at Ford, engineers are developing new ways to hide Ford prototypes in plain sight – using modern camouflage designs and techniques, said Schembari.

For years, Ford has been locked in a high-stakes game of cat-and-mouse with spy photographers – trying to keep its vehicles a secret until it's time to show them to the world. But modern cell phones changed that.

“While design is the fourth most important reason for purchase in the industry overall, it's number two only behind fuel economy for Ford,” said Dave Fish, senior vice president, Expert Services at MaritzCX, a firm that conducts the New Vehicle Customer Study.

“It's not surprising Ford goes to extraordinary lengths to try to keep the wraps on its designs as long as possible.”

Gone are the days when unsightly black vinyl was the only way to hide a vehicle, Fish said.

Now, this heavy cladding that's difficult to apply is used in only a small percentage of testing, as Ford is employing more ef-

fective methods for concealing its vehicles throughout product development.

Primarily, Ford is using vinyl stickers with patterns that trick the eye and hide body lines to cover its vehicles, Fish said. The modern patterns create an optical illusion that makes it difficult to see details.

These techniques result in obscure photographs, allowing Ford not only to hide its products from spy photographers, but to preserve its confidential designs and sustain its competitive edge, said Fish.

“The work we're doing is crucial to Ford staying competitive in a constantly evolving industry,” said John LaQue, Ford section supervisor, Prototype Planning and Build.

“When we make it to a reveal without a photo surfacing of a non-camouflaged car, we have all done our jobs.”

Each type of camouflage serves a purpose through various stages of development, LaQue said.

Unlike vinyl cladding, vinyl stickers are universal – they

don't have to be made specifically for each vehicle. Stickers are stuck on the car in no particular order, are quicker to install and more durable, plus they allow for more accurate testing as they don't add as much weight.

The stickers don't trap heat, nor do they so dramatically affect the aerodynamics of the vehicle.

Ford's camouflage team can even change the shape of a vehicle to further mislead spies, LaQue said.

The use of faux body panels can drastically change the look of a car, so an observer doesn't know what the real vehicle looks like.

Adding length or height is a key misdirection used to keep the true dimensions of a vehicle under wraps.

As camera technology gets more sophisticated and even more readily available, engineers are working, Fish said, to advance vehicle camouflage techniques to keep Ford one step ahead of both the spies and the competition.



Photographing the camouflaged Ford just doesn't work.

Chrysler Offering Help to Black Farmers

The National Black Farmers Association (NBFA) Scholarship Program has opened the application period for 2016 scholarships.

The application site, <https://scholarsapply.org/blackfarmersassociation>, will remain open from March 1 to May 2, 2016, or until 100 applications have been received, whichever comes first, said Fiat Chrysler spokesman Kevin Frazier.

Funded through a grant from the FCA Foundation, the charitable arm of Fiat Chrysler, Frazier said the program provides scholarships of up to \$5,000 to students pursuing agriculture-related study at an accredited two-year or four-year college, university or vocational-technical school.

“Higher education provides transformational tools, knowledge and resources,” said Lesley Slavitt, head of Civic Engagement, Fiat Chrysler, and CEO of the FCA Foundation.

“It is a privilege for the FCA Foundation to be a partner in ensuring that the next generation of African-American farmers receives the training and skills that will help them to thrive.”

NBFA scholarship recipients are selected based upon several criteria, including academic performance, demonstrated leadership and participation in agricultural and community activities, and career goals and objectives.

“The scholarship funds went toward my tuition, which has helped to lift some of the financial burdens placed on my family and I,” said Michael Coleman, a 2015 NBFA scholarship recipient who is pursuing a degree in animal science at Alcorn State University. Coleman, a Raymond, Miss., native, was awarded a \$5,000 NBFA scholarship.

Established in May 2015, Frazier said the National Black Farmers Association Scholarship Pro-

gram awarded 19 scholarships nationally – a total of \$87,000 – to support the development of a new generation of African-American farmers.

“In 1910, nearly 1 million black farm families owned over 15 million acres of land. Today, less than 45,000 black farm families own 3 million acres,” said John Boyd, Jr., president of the National Black Farmers Association. “The National Black Farmers Association Scholarship Program is a huge step in the right direction for the survival of America's black farmers.”

“Educating black farmers provides an opportunity to increase and advance agricultural tech-

nology, which will be passed on as a vital part of our rich farming legacy to future generations.”

The National Black Farmers Association is a nonprofit organization representing African-American farmers and their families in the United States, Frazier said.

As an association, it serves tens of thousands of members nationwide, Frazier said. NBFA's education and advocacy efforts have been focused on civil rights, land retention, access to public and private loans, education and agricultural training, and rural economic development for black and other small farmers.



Opel Group CEO Dr. Karl-Thomas Neumann with the new Astra.

Europe Auto Journalists Call Opel Astra ‘Car of the Year’

The new Opel Astra was named “Car of the Year 2016” at the 86th Geneva International Auto Show, which is taking place March 3-13.

Opel spokesman Jean-Philippe Kempf said the 58-strong jury of automotive journalists from 22 European countries awarded the Astra a total of 309 points versus 294 for the Volvo XC90 and 202 for the Mazda MX-5.

The “Car of the Year 2016” trophy was presented to Opel CEO Dr. Karl-Thomas Neumann by COTY president Hakan Matson on the eve of the first press day at the show last week.

The Astra emerged as the winner from a field of seven COTY finalists, Kempf said. More than 40 new cars, from roadsters to premium limousines and sports utility vehicles, were among the original contenders.

“The new Astra represents the start of a new era at Opel, and victory in this year's ‘Car of the Year’ competition shows that we are on the right track,” said Neumann. “It is an honor for us to receive such a prestigious award from leading automotive journalists.”

Three new Opel models have been named “Car of the Year” in its last eight shows, Kempf said. The new Astra has already won international awards such as SAFETYBEST 2015 and the 2015 Golden Steering Wheel since its launch last fall. It also received the maximum five stars for its performance in the Euro NCAP crash test.

Both the five-door and the Sports Tourer variants of the new titleholder are based on a completely new lightweight vehicle architecture, Kempf said.

Power is delivered exclusively by the newest-generation diesel

and gasoline engines.

Smartphone integration and the groundbreaking personal connectivity and service assistant Opel OnStar enable ultra-modern connectivity.

The Astra also continues Opel's tradition of introducing features previously only known from higher segments into the compact segment, such as IntelliLux LED matrix light, said Kempf.

The European Car of the Year award was first awarded in 1964. This year's victory, said Kempf, takes Opel's total “Car of the Year” tally to five. The Opel Kadett E was the first car from Rüsselsheim to win the award in 1985. Two years later, the Omega A once again took the pan-European accolade, Kempf said. In recent years, Opel has come out on top twice – with the Insignia in 2009 and the Ampera in 2012.

Complete Air Bag Recall Debated

DETROIT (AP) – The nation's top auto safety regulator said a recall of all Takata air bags wouldn't provide significant safety benefits and could exceed the government's legal authority.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Chief Mark Rosekind also said a total recall would strain the replacement parts network and increase uncertainty for consumers, which Rosekind stated in a letter to Florida Senator Bill Nelson, who asked the agency to recall all Takata inflators.

Takata's air bag inflators can explode with too much force, hurling shrapnel. At least 10 people have died worldwide and 139 have been hurt.

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Driverless Car Catches Bus – with Bumper

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cameras hit the side of the bus near the company's headquarters in Mountain View, Calif.

No one was injured, according to an accident report Google wrote and submitted to the California Department of Motor Vehicles. It was posted online Feb. 29.

According to the report, Google's car intended to turn right off a major boulevard when it detected sandbags around a storm drain at the intersection.

The right lane was wide enough to let some cars turn and others go straight, but the Lexus needed to slide to its left within the right lane to get around the obstruction.

The Lexus was going 2 mph when it made the move and its left front struck the right side of the bus, which was going straight at 15 mph.

The car's test driver – who under state law must be in the front seat to grab the wheel when needed – thought the bus would yield and did not have control before the collision, Google said.

While the report does not address fault, Google said in a written statement, "We clearly bear some responsibility, because if our car hadn't moved, there wouldn't have been a collision."

Chris Urmson, the head of Google's self-driving car project, said in a brief interview that he believes the Lexus was moving before the bus started to pass.

"We saw the bus, we tracked the bus, we thought the bus was going to slow down, we started to pull out, there was some momentum involved," Urmson told *The Associated Press*.

He acknowledged that Google's car did have some responsibility but said it was "not black and white."

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority said none of the 15 passengers or the driver of the bus was injured.

The transit agency is reviewing the incident and hasn't reached any conclusions about liability, its spokeswoman Stacey Hendler Ross said in a written statement.

There may never be a legal decision on fault, especially if damage was negligible – as both sides indicated it was – and neither Google nor the transit authority pushes the case.

Still, the collision could be the first time a Google car in autonomous mode caused a crash.

Google cars have been involved in nearly a dozen collisions in or around Mountain View since starting to test on city streets in the spring of 2014. In most cases, Google's cars were rear-ended.

No one has been seriously injured.

Google's written statement called the Feb. 14 collision "a classic example of the negotiation that's a normal part of driving – we're all trying to predict each other's movements."

Google said its computers have reviewed the incident and engineers changed the software that governs the cars to understand that buses may not be as inclined to yield as other vehicles.

Jessica Gonzalez, a spokeswoman for California's DMV, which regulates Google's testing of about two dozen Lexus SUVs in the state, said agency officials spoke last week with Google but would have no comment.

Under state law, Google must retain data from the moments before and after any collision.

"As far as he-said she-said, there shouldn't be any of that. It's all there," said Robert W. Peterson, an insurance law expert at Santa Clara University who has studied self-driving cars.

A critic of Google's self-driving car efforts said the collision shows the tech giant should be

kept from taking onto public streets self-driving prototypes it built without a steering wheel or pedals.

Google sees that as the next natural step for the technology, and has pressed California's DMV and federal regulators to authorize cars in which humans have limited means of intervening.

"Clearly Google's robot cars can't reliably cope with everyday driving situations," said John M. Simpson of the nonprofit Consumer Watchdog.

"There needs to be a licensed driver who can take over, even if in this case the test driver failed to step in as he should have."

Toyota Adds 331K To Recall to Fix Takata Air Bags

DETROIT (AP) – Toyota is adding 331,000 cars worldwide to an existing recall of passenger air bags made by Japanese supplier Takata Corp.

The new recall includes the 2008 Corolla and Corolla Matrix sedans and the 2008-10 Lexus SC430 convertible.

Almost 200,000 of the cars are in the United States.

Toyota previously recalled the same vehicles from earlier model years. It added more based on new information from Takata on March 2.

Takata air bags can inflate with too much force and spew shrapnel into the vehicle, injuring drivers and passengers.

Ten deaths worldwide have been blamed on the air bag problem.

Toyota says it isn't aware of any injuries related to the latest recall, but there have been occupants injured in some of the 15.3 million vehicles it has recalled worldwide.

Toyota will notify owners and replace the air bags for free.

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‘My Car Does What?’ Plan Explains Safety Technology

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

then technology can be the cure.”

But if people don’t know about the technology in their vehicles or how the tech works, then all the latest advances can be wasted, Hersman said. The number of automotive fatalities increased 8 percent, to about 38,000, between 2014 and 2015. That’s the largest increase in 50 years.

Hersman said one reason is that, with the improving economy, more people are driving longer distances. More driving means more accidents. But the increase in driving between 2014 and 2015 was only 3 percent.

So, Hersman said, what accounts for the additional 5 percent increase in deaths?

Addressing that question was Daniel McGehee, director of the Transportation and Vehicle Safety Research Program at the University of Iowa, a group that has been working with the National Safety Council by studying the question of automotive safety.

“Data is king,” McGehee said. “So we conducted a national survey to see what people knew about their vehicles. We learned that people knew what things like anti-lock brakes and adaptive cruise control are. But technology like lane departure warning and forward collision warning are less well-known.”

The survey, McGehee said, revealed that at one point or another, people will react when startled by such technology in a way that surprises them. And being surprised can be one way an accident happens, he said.

He said technology is changing so rapidly that it’s even difficult for salespeople to keep up.

McGehee said that while there

is a lot of useful information in driver’s manuals, they aren’t the easiest to read.

“The bottom line of the study is that we’ve learned that a lot of consumers are uncertain about the new safety technologies,” McGehee said. “Consumers may have heard of features, but have no experience with them. Take, for example, the tire gauge light. It might pop on during the winter, but consumers might not understand what it means.”

Hersman said that once the NSC understood the gaps in consumer knowledge, the next step was to design an education program that will reach consumers in a variety of different demographics.

To that end, the NSC created a Web site – mycardoeswhat.org – with videos informing viewers about various safety features. The NSC has also created an ambassador program to reach out to the public and will also use social media as a venue of communication. They have also reached out to various states’ departments of motor vehicles.

That way, Hersman said, people waiting in line at DMVs can watch videos informing them about their cars.

“Everyone wants safer driving,” Hersman said. “The average age of a car on the road today is 11 years. There are a lot of drivers who are unfamiliar with the new technology and they will be buying cars with it in the future.”

But, she said, technology is constantly changing and just because you know something today, doesn’t mean you’ll know it tomorrow. That’s why education, she said, is an important step in making driving safer for everyone.

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MYLink Touch Screen Radio, Remote Keyless Entry
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*Lease payment examples for Cruze, Malibu and Trax at GM Employee Discount Price plus tax, title, plate, zero security deposit, first month payment (first payment waived for Cruze and Malibu only) and doc. fees due at signing with all rebates including GM Competitive Lease Conquest Private Offer (customer's qualifying competitive lease must have a scheduled end date within 365 days of the delivery date of the new vehicle) assigned to dealer. Lessee responsible for excess wear and tear as well as exceeded contracted mileage. Due to advertising deadlines, prices subject to change. See dealer for details.

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*All prices and payments include GM rebates. Pictures may not represent actual vehicle. Prices subject to change per GM incentives. Prices and payments are inclusive of active GM employee discount (unless otherwise stated). All leases are 10,000 miles per year with approved S Tier credit. All leases are 24 months except for the GMC Yukon, Lacrosse, Encave, which are 36 month leases and Cascada which is a 39 month lease. All Vehicles shown are \$999 down. Deposition Fee may be required at vehicle turn in. Must have lease loyalty and/or conquest. Must have closing competitive lease. Prices and payments are plus tax, title, plate fee w/ acquisition fee up front, refundable security deposit required on certain vehicles -- to be determined by lender. For Sierra, Acadia, Terrain must be trading in a non GM vehicle. **\$3,500 trade in is valid on 2003 or newer vehicles w/ under 115k miles in drivable condition, no branded titles, reconditioning determined by appraiser. Certain restrictions may apply, see dealer for complete details. ** Exp date: 3/31/2016

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*All applicable rebates including lease/conquest offers have been deducted from sale price/payment. Pictures may not represent actual vehicle. Prices subject to change per GM incentives. Prices and payments are inclusive of active GM Employee Discount (Unless otherwise stated). Equinox, Malibu, Trax, Traverse, Silverado, and Camaro are 24 month leases. Volt and Impala are 36 month leases. All leases are 10k miles per year w/ approved S Tier credit w/ \$999 due at signing. Prices & payments are plus tax, title, and plate fees with acquisition fee up front. Deposition Fee may be required at vehicle turn in. Refundable security deposit required on certain vehicles -- to be determined by lender. **\$3500 trade-in is valid on 2003 or newer vehicles with under 115k miles in drivable condition, no branded titles, less reconditioning determined by appraiser. Certain restrictions may apply, see dealer for complete details. ** Expiration Date -- 3/31/16.

Autonomous Cars May Come About More Gradually

GENEVA (AP) – Cars that drive themselves would mean a revolution in how people get around.

But they might arrive just as much by evolution, with everyday cars getting gradually smarter, as by sudden shifts to fully self-driving vehicles.

Autonomous driving – and its potential for sweeping change – was much on the minds of top auto executives at the Geneva International Motor Show.

The exhibit space in Geneva was mostly used for the show's primary purpose: showing off product to the news media and the public in order to boost sales. The display stands were dominated by expensive sports and luxury cars for the rich and new SUVs for more middle-class buyers.

But the future beyond the upcoming model year was very much a topic of discussion, if less visible on the display stands. Executives think that cars that drive themselves at least part of the time may be upon us by the end of this decade. Technology such as autonomous driving by cars equipped with cameras and radar sensors could blend with Internet connections and apps. For instance, a car could be ordered for a few hours through an app and drive itself to the customer.

Google, meanwhile, is testing completely autonomous cars on streets in Mountain View, Calif., as well as in Austin, Texas, and Kirkland, Wash.

Daimler CEO Dieter Zetsche said his company sees "two roads to full autonomy, one being the more evolutionary one where basically more and more assistance systems kind of automatically lead to a fully autonomous car.

"The other one is more revolutionary ... where first in restricted areas you have fully autonomous cars and over time you expand the area where you can do that. And I would say in restricted areas you can see fully autonomous cars in the latter path around the turn of the decade."

Some vehicles at the Geneva show made the case for evolution. The Mercedes-Benz E-Class luxury sedan already offers optional driver assistance technology. The latest version of the car can avoid collisions at intersections by recognizing crossing traffic and braking.

Fiat Chrysler Merges with Media Mogul

MILAN (AP) – Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and the publisher Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso SpA have announced a merger to create "a leading player in the Italian media and publishing businesses."

Fiat, which owns the Turin daily La Stampa, said March 2 it has signed a memorandum of understanding to merge its editorial operation with L'Espresso, publisher of the Rome daily La Repubblica and L'Espresso weekly magazine.

The deal brings together two of Italy's top industrialist families under new generation management – Fiat's largest shareholder the Agnelli family and the De Benedetti family, which controls L'Espresso.

The move comes six months after the Agnelli family's Exor Group bought a 50 percent stake in the Economist magazine.

Fiat said the Italian merger had "potential for significant revenue and synergies."

The value of the deal wasn't disclosed.