Detroit Auto Show Recap: Everything You Need To Know

The Associated Press

A roundup of highlights and news out of the Detroit auto show on Monday:

Chrysler may rehire workers if sales forecasts met

DETROIT (AP) — Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne said the automaker will start hiring production workers again if it sells enough cars and trucks.

Marchionne said at the Detroit auto show that Chrysler Group LLC is revamping its models and will need more engineering and development workers. He said the company doesn't have the manpower at present to accomplish what it wants to do.

He didn't give a time frame for hiring more production workers but said it will depend on meeting its own sales projections.

Marchionne also said Chrysler still has cash reserves and is performing slightly better than expected despite a very difficult 2009.

He added that this year is a make-it-or-break-it year for Fiat's Alfa Romeo brand. But he stopped short of saying the brand would be sold.

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GM will make pure-electric version of Chevy Volt

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors Co. will build a pure-electric vehicle by expanding the Chevrolet Volt's battery pack and removing its internal combustion engine, Vice Chairman Bob Lutz said.

He would not say exactly when such a vehicle would make it into showrooms, but said it would be "technologically trivial" to switch the Volt to pure electric.

The Volt can run 40 miles on a charge from a standard home power outlet. After the battery runs down, a 1.4-liter four-cylinder internal combustion engine takes over and generates electricity to power the car.

It goes on sale in November. GM confirmed Monday that Michigan will be one of the first markets for the Volt. The company had previously said California will be another early market.

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GMC unveils urban truck concept in Detroit

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors Co. unveiled the new GMC Granite, a sign that the automaker may enter the hip urban mini-truck fray against the Kia Soul and Nissan Cube.

The short, wide Granite is a cross between a panel truck and a minivan. GM says it is loaded with electronics and features that appeal to young professionals and has rear seats that flip and fold to create more cargo space.

The Granite would be the smallest vehicle ever assigned to the GMC brand if GM decides to build it. It would be powered by a 1.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine with satin or brushed-metal finishes instead of chrome.

Nissan Motor Co.'s Cube and Kia Motor Corp.'s Soul are small trucks also aimed at young professionals.

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Toyota unveils pint-sized hybrid concept car

DETROIT (AP) — Toyota unveiled a new hybrid concept car that is smaller than the Prius and geared toward younger buyers, part of the Japanese automaker's strategy to expand its lineup of hybrid and alternative-fuel vehicles.

Toyota showed off the FT-CH compact car at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit.

No official timetable has been set for sale of the vehicle to the public, but Toyota plans to sell more than 1 million hybrids per year globally by the end of the decade. It also plans plug-in hybrids and electric cars starting in the 2012 model year and hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles in 2015.

The plan to broaden the Prius brand is a sign of its success and loyalty among buyers. The Prius, which launched in the U.S. in 2000, has long been the nation's top-selling hybrid and was the best-selling vehicle overall in Japan last year.

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GM may reopen some factories to meet higher demand

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors Co. may reopen some shuttered factories to keep up with growing demand.

Mark Reuss, GM's North American president, said that plants building the Chevrolet Equinox, GMC Terrain and Cadillac SRX crossover vehicles and the Buick LaCrosse sedan are at capacity.

Reuss said the company would try to raise output at existing plants in the short

term. He stopped short of saying any plants would be reopened, but mentioned an idled factory in Spring Hill, Tenn. as versatile enough to build several models.

The Terrain and Equinox are made at a factory in Ingersoll, Ontario, while the LaCrosse is built in Kansas City, Kan. The SRX is made in Ramos Arizpe, Mexico.

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Honda aims to add flair to hybrid market with CR-Z

DETROIT (AP) — Honda Motor Co. showed off the production model of the 2011 CR-Z, a sporty two-seater hybrid that will go on sale late summer in the U.S. at the Detroit auto show.

The CR-Z hatchback is Honda's attempt to bring a bit of flair to the hybrid segment, whose design has long dominated by the boxy lines and sloping roofs of four-door sedans like the Toyota Prius. The two-door CR-Z, by contrast, features a compact profile and roadster look.

It also comes with multiple drive modes that allow cycling between sportier or more fuel-efficient drive settings.

The CR-Z is Honda's latest bid for market share in the gas-electric hybrid market. The Insight, a four-door sedan that went on sale in the U.S. last year, was designed to compete with the market-leading Prius. Honda also sells a hybrid version of its Accord midsize sedan.

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Ford Fusion Hybrid wins 2010 car of year award

DETROIT (AP) — Ford Motor Co.'s market momentum got a lift by winning both the 2010 North American Car and Truck of the Year awards.

Ford's Fusion Hybrid midsize sedan took top car honors and its versatile Transit Connect compact van snagged truck of the year at the Detroit auto show.

It was only the third time in 17 years that an automaker has won both awards, selected by 49 auto journalists and given annually since 1994. Finalists for the car award included the Buick LaCrosse and Volkswagen Golf GTI and TDI diesel. The Chevrolet Equinox, Ford Transit Connect and Subaru Outback were finalists for the truck award.

The awards, given annually by journalists who test cars throughout the year, are often used by automakers in advertising. Vehicles are judged on innovation, design, safety, handling, driver satisfaction and value.

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Honda: No electric plans for now

DETROIT (AP) — All-electric vehicles from BMW AG, Nissan Motor Co. and others may be the rage at this year's Detroit auto show, but Honda Motor Co. isn't jumping on the bandwagon. Honda executives said that Honda is researching a short-distance, electric commuter car, but believes electric technology isn't yet good enough for mass-market use.

"We understand electric vehicle technology as well as anyone," Honda CEO Takanobu Ito told reporters at the show, noting that Honda had an electric vehicle leasing program in the 1990s.

Ito and others said Honda continues to believe that hydrogen fuel cell technology is the way to have the most impact on vehicle emissions. Ito said Honda's fuel-cell vehicle, the FCX Clarity, is ready for the market now, but there is virtually no hydrogen fueling infrastructure. Honda has been leasing the FCX Clarity to customers since 2007.

John Mendel, Honda's top U.S. sales executive, said the FCX Clarity also is an electric car, just fueled by hydrogen, so it's also giving Honda valuable experience if it decides it should produce electrics.

"We've been a fuel economy leader for 30 years," he said. "We will continue to endeavor to maintain that position."

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Chevrolet Spark minicar headed to US in 2012

DETROIT (AP) — The Chevrolet Spark minicar, already on sale in Europe, is coming to the U.S. in 2012.

General Motors Corp. showed off the five-door Spark, the smallest car in Chevrolet's lineup, at the Detroit auto show. The company plans to produce the car in China.

GM Vice Chairman Bob Lutz said the company considers Spark its "insurance policy" in case gas prices go up and consumers flock to microcars. But he said he's unsure U.S. consumers will want to drive a car that is even smaller than the Chevrolet Aveo, Honda Fit and Toyota Yaris.

"It may be a size smaller than what most people are going to accept," he said. GM didn't reveal pricing or fuel economy for the Spark.

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