

U.S. Auto Sales Rose 19 Percent During April Buying Frenzy

The Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — U.S. sales of cars and trucks are expected to rise 19 percent in April as customers worried about shortages of Japanese cars rushed to buy the models they wanted.

Automakers will release monthly sales results starting around 11 a.m. EDT Tuesday.

In March, sales jumped 17 percent from a year earlier to 1.25 million, a healthy rate that showed the auto industry's steady recovery remains on track.

April could be the last big sales month for a while as automakers start to run short of models, mainly small and midsize cars. Some car production is being limited because companies in North America are running low on supplies from Japan.

Those supplies, which include paint pigments, are made in factories damaged or disrupted by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Japanese automakers are the hardest hit by the supply disruption, but U.S. automakers Ford, General Motors and Chrysler have all curtailed some output.

Toyota has said it won't return to a regular production schedule in Japan until November at the earliest, and Honda said Monday that North American production could be disrupted until the end of the year.

The primary impact will be on brands manufactured solely in Japan. Small cars such as the Honda Fit and Toyota Yaris could be in short supply, says Jesse Toprak, vice president of industry trends and insights for TrueCar.com, an automotive website.

Dealers and analysts say a shift to small and midsize cars and crossover vehicles from trucks, SUVs and large cars continued in April, when gas prices reached \$4 a gallon in many states.

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