

Japan Automakers On Mend After Disaster

Tomoko A. Hosaka, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's automakers reported mixed vehicle production figures Monday as the industry works toward recovery from the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Some, such as Nissan, are doing considerably better than others.

Nissan Motor Co. made 419,831 vehicles worldwide in June, up 18.5 percent from the same time last year and an all-time record for a single month.

Its production in Japan rose 1.9 percent to 102,390 units thanks to strong demand for the Juke and Rogue crossovers. Global vehicle sales rose more than 13 percent in volume terms, and exports jumped 25 percent.

Separately, the Yokohama-based automaker unveiled plans to expand aggressively in Southeast Asia over the next six years. It aims to more than triple sales to 500,000 vehicles in the region, which includes Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. It also targets a 15 percent market share by the end of 2016, up from 6 percent last fiscal year.

"As car demand in emerging markets has been rising rapidly, we foresee it will soon capture more than half of global sales volumes," said Toru Hasegawa, president of Nissan Motor Asia Pacific Co. and Nissan Motor Thailand, in a statement. Southeast Asian countries "are among those we have marked as our strategic growth drivers."

Bigger rival Toyota Motor Corp. also posted encouraging numbers. Although global production fell 9.2 percent to 593,839 vehicles, the result is a vast improvement from the 49 percent plunge it recorded in May.

Toyota's domestic sales fell almost 36 percent in June, and exports retreated 21 percent.

Its domestic and overseas production levels should return to near pre-earthquake levels in July and reach full production later this year, Toyota said. It also plans to make an extra 350,000 vehicles from October through March 2012 to make up for production lost to the disaster and its aftereffects.

The magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami wiped out much of Japan's northeast coast, damaging factories and disrupting supplies of crucial components, forcing Japanese automakers to pull back on production and exports.

Honda Motor Co. is facing a tougher comeback. Its output worldwide in June fell 44.5 percent from last year to 168,373 vehicles, just a slight improvement from a 50.4 percent decline recorded in May.

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Domestic sales slumped almost 36 percent, and exports plunged more than 60 percent. Both figures were nearly flat from the previous month's result.

Honda's production levels even fell under those of usually smaller rival Suzuki Motor Corp, both in June and for the first six months of the year.

Suzuki made 197,178 vehicles worldwide in June, down 15 percent from a year earlier. Its output from January to June totaled 1.36 million units, outpacing Honda's 1.30 million units.

Suzuki's Japan sales retreated about 12 percent, and exports fell 23 percent.

Meanwhile, Mitsubishi Motors Corp. said global production rose 15.1 percent to 106,267 vehicles in June. Exports climbed more than 25 percent, while Japan sales fell 10 percent.

Worldwide output at Mazda Motor Corp. slipped 1.3 percent in June to 113,786 vehicles. Its domestic sales tumbled almost 32 percent from a year earlier. Solid demand from Europe and Oceania sent exports up 3 percent in the month, Mazda said.

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