

GM Streamlines Volt Plant, Delays 2nd Shift

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — General Motors Co. is delaying plans to add a second shift at the factory that makes Chevrolet Volt electric cars.

The company said Friday it has found ways to make one shift more efficient, so it can produce the same number of cars as two shifts.

Spokesman Chris Lee says GM still will add 300 workers at the Detroit-Hamtramck plant — but not a second shift — by the end of this year to make more Volts.

In May, the company announced it would add a second shift late this year to increase Volt production from 16,000 per year to 60,000. A second shift will be added, though, but not until the last half of 2012, when the plant starts building the 2013 Chevrolet Malibu midsize sedan in addition to the Volt.

GM said the change had nothing to do with Volt sales, which have been slower than expected. The company said demand for the car still is strong and it's sticking with plans to build 60,000 next year. That number includes the Opel Ampera, a version of the Volt to be sold in Europe.

"This decision will significantly reduce costs, and has no impact on the plant's ability to make 60,000 Volts and Amperas," Lee said in a statement. "This approach is just a more efficient way to make the same number of vehicles."

Through September, GM has sold only 3,895 Volts, far short of its goal of 10,000 in the first year. But Lee said the car, which can run solely on battery power for about 35 miles before a gasoline generator kicks in, is only on sale in 27 states and should be for sale nationwide by year-end. "Dealers are still clamoring for them," he said.

GM engineers figured out a way to clear several bottlenecks that were slowing down the Volt plant and increase its assembly-line speed, the company said. For example, they were able to speed up the body shop, where the frame and other parts are welded together, by automating more tasks.

GM plans to add more than 200 jobs when the second shift arrives next year. The plant, which straddles the border between Detroit and the enclave of Hamtramck, now has about 1,000 workers. GM said in May that it would get another 2,500 jobs when second and third shifts are added.

In addition to the Malibu and Volt, the plant is expected to build the new version of the Chevrolet Impala, a large front-wheel-drive sedan, for the 2013 model year. GM has said it will invest \$69 million for equipment at the plant. The plant stopped making two other big cars at the factory, the Cadillac DTS and Buick Lucerne, in June.

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To accommodate the increased Volt production, GM will add a second shift at a plant that assembles Volt battery packs. The plant in Brownstown Township, Michigan, south of Detroit, got 30 more workers who will start making battery packs this month, Lee said.

Many of the newly hired workers will make around \$15 per hour, about half the pay of a veteran factory worker.

The new jobs are part of a larger GM expansion to create or keep about 4,000 jobs by investing \$2 billion in 17 factories in the U.S.

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