

Mazda To Stop Making Rotary-Engine Vehicles

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TOKYO (AP) — Mazda will stop producing vehicles with its signature rotary engines in June next year because of poor sales and the costs of meeting emissions standards.

Mazda Motor Corp. said Friday the latest edition of the Mazda RX-8 will go on sale Nov. 24, targeting sales of 1,000 vehicles, but will end production in June 2012. The RX-8 is the only model in Mazda's lineup with the rotary engine,

The Japanese automaker, based in Hiroshima, introduced its first rotary engine car in 1967 and is the only automaker in the world that makes rotary engine vehicles. Such engines have fewer moving parts and are quieter than comparable piston engines but are more expensive to manufacture and consume more fuel.

Mazda's decision underlines how consumer tastes have changed to preferring green vehicles over sporty ones.

Mazda spokeswoman Michiko Terashima said research and development on the rotary engine will continue, but production is now not making sense when considering the costs of meeting safety and emissions standards for new vehicles.

Mazda sold only 2,896 RX-8 cars last year, with 1,245 of them in North America and 963 in Japan. Cumulative sales of Mazda vehicles with rotary engines total about 1.995 million as of the end of August, according to Mazda, which also makes the Miata sportscar.

Mazda Chief Executive and President Takashi Yamanouchi recalled the victory of Mazda's rotary engine at Le Mans 20 years ago, and called the rotary engine "iconic."

"Although R-X production is ending, the rotary engine will always represent the spirits of Mazda, and Mazda remains committed to its ongoing development," he said.

Mazda, which has lost money for the last three fiscal years, is struggling to assert its brand as the relationship with longtime partner Ford Motor Co. weakens.

Mazda does not have flashy green technologies in its lineup that its bigger Japanese rivals do — such as the hybrids at Toyota Motor Corp. or electric vehicles at Nissan Motor Co. The fading away of its prized rotary engine — although largely symbolic — is yet another blow.

Dearborn-based Ford bought 25 percent of Mazda in 1979, raising it to 33.4 percent in 1996. But Ford began cutting ties in 2008, and last year lowered its ownership to

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

3.5 percent.

Source URL (retrieved on 03/29/2015 - 10:41pm):

<http://www.impomag.com/news/2011/10/mazda-stop-making-rotary-engine-vehicles>