

Detroit Auto Show To Open Amid Hopes For Better Sales

DETROIT, Jan. 9 (Kyodo) — Coming out of another tough economic year, automakers will kick off the annual North American International Auto Show on Monday in Detroit, emphasizing their confidence in the future with vehicles targeted at consumers expected to buy more vehicles.

Though the industry is expected to focus on fuel economy and the environment as they did in last year's show, forecasts for improved sales in 2012 have given carmakers the needed boost to promote their products.

"With annual sales still far below the level achieved prior to the last recession, there's plenty of indication that pent-up demand is far from spent," Edmunds Inc. Chief Economist Lacey Plache said in a 2011 year-end press release. The U.S. research company forecast 13.6 million new car sales in the United States for 2012 against an estimated 12.8 million in 2011.

American manufacturers such as Chrysler Group LLC, General Motors Co. and Ford Motor Co. hope to use the advantage of the hometown show and an increased share in the U.S. market in 2011 to drum up excitement about their vehicle debuts.

"American automakers have a lot of reasons to be excited right now, and we'll see some of that swagger come alive on their home turf," Edmunds Senior Analyst Michelle Krebs said in a press release ahead of the 24th annual show.

Chrysler will debut its 2013 Dodge Dart compact car, which will be the brand's reentry into the compact sedan segment, with a Fiat architecture influence. The car's engine options include a MultiAir engine that improves fuel efficiency and reduces carbon emissions.

GM will unveil the 2013 Cadillac ATS compact luxury car in a move toward competition in a sector dominated by German cars, according to the company.

"We've developed a compelling and convincing new challenger," GM Senior Vice President of Global Product Development Mary Barra said in a press release announcing the car.

Japanese automakers are expected to show their recovery from last year's devastating earthquake and tsunami, which triggered supply chain disruptions, leading to shortages in U.S. dealerships.

Toyota Motor Corp. is set to introduce the NS4, an advanced plug-in hybrid concept, to the world while taking the wraps off its Prius c hybrid for the first time in North

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America.

Heavily hit by the disaster, Honda Motor Co. will reveal the direction of the next generation of its Accord Coupe with a worldwide debut of the Accord Coupe concept.

After a three-year absence from the show, Nissan Motor Co. will show off two concept vehicles, an all-electric van and an SUV concept for its Pathfinder line.

With more than 500 new cars and trucks displayed and an additional 25,000 square feet in the city's Cobo Center, organizers are optimistic about the annual show, which saw over 730,000 visitors last year.

"This show will educate, entertain and astonish," said 2012 NAIAS chairman Bill Perkins.

The exhibition will open to the media Monday and Tuesday. It will open to the general public Jan. 14-22.

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