Ford Unveils 2013 Ford Fusion

Jenna Fryer, AP Auto Racing Writer

CONCORD, N.C. (AP) — Ford on Tuesday became the first manufacturer in NASCAR to unveil its 2013 car, rolling out a Fusion that closely resembles what fans can buy off the showroom floor.

"The NASCAR Nation is made up of car enthusiasts, and NASCAR fans certainly love to pull for a brand or make of car second only to being able to pull for their favorite driver," said NASCAR President Mike Helton. "Today is a very significant landmark for us. It brings back the relevancy of NASCAR on the race track to what fans have in their homes and in their parking lots and garages and at their parking spots at work."

NASCAR officials worked with representatives of its four auto manufacturers to try to make the Sprint Cup car more closely resemble each manufacturer's production cars.

Ford's Fusion was a joint project between the Ford Design Center and Ford Racing.

"We wanted Fusion to be the car that helped return 'stock car' to NASCAR," said Jamie Allison, director of Ford Racing. "I think fans, when they see the car, are just going to smile and cheer. It is going to re-engage them with the sport and make the sport better because there is just something natural about seeing race cars that look like cars in their driveways."

The 2013 Ford Fusion mirrors its production car. It is the third time Ford simultaneously launched production and NASCAR versions of a new model. The first dual launch came in 1968 with the Torino, the second was in 2006 with the newly introduced Fusion.

The 2013 Fusion has a redesigned silhouette and an identifiable front end grill. The overall proportion of the race car now reflects proportions of the showroom Fusion, and the race car has brand and design cues in the side of the vehicle.

"It's a pretty sexy looking race car," said driver Greg Biffle, who was behind the wheel of the Fusion for its unveiling and turned laps in the car around Charlotte Motor Speedway.

"My blood is flowing right now. I am really excited. I can't wait to start racing them and testing them.

Chevrolet, Dodge and Toyota have not said when they will unveil their 2013 cars. NASCAR allowed the four automakers to remodel their race cars to make them more brand identifiable, and Allison is certain the new cars will stand apart.

"The cars will not look anything like each other," Allison said. "The car's identity, the car's definition, it happens at eye level. Every car will now look identifiable as its production sibling."

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