

Volkswagen Sales Over 8M In 2011

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FRANKFURT (AP) — German automaker Volkswagen AG expects a tough 2012 even as it reported record sales of more than 8 million vehicles last year that put it ahead of Japan's Toyota Motor Corp.

Volkswagen said in a statement on Monday that it delivered 8.156 million vehicles in 2011, a 14 percent rise over the previous year.

Toyota, whose production suffered from the tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster, has reported sales of 7.9 million vehicles in 2011, while General Motors Co. has not yet reported. It is expected to have sold some 9 million based on projections from the first three quarters.

Volkswagen, whose brands include Audi, Skoda and Seat, has a goal of producing 10 million vehicles per year and passing Toyota and GM to become the world's biggest automaker by 2018. Some analysts have said that VW is already the world's biggest because GM's figures include vehicles made by a joint venture in China.

The Detroit-based automaker had been at the top for more than seven decades until Toyota took the crown in 2008.

Volkswagen's top sales and marketing executive, Christian Klingler, said that "all the company's brands have shown increases in difficult conditions on volatile markets" and called the 2011 figures "an outstanding result."

But he added that the coming year will be demanding. "In 2012 the risks are increasing above all on European markets."

The 17 countries that use the euro are struggling with a financial crisis over too much government debt. Fears that a country may default and damage the banking system have weighed on the wider economy and many think the eurozone economy may have shrunk in the last three months of 2011.

Volkswagen CEO Winterkorn is holding a news conference later at the Detroit Auto Show.

The 2011 figures underlined a strong year for German automakers, who have profited from strong sales and profits in emerging markets, especially China. Volkswagen, Daimler AG's Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and Porsche have all recorded record vehicle sales for the year.

Luxury carmaker BMW AG reported Monday that it sold a record 1.67 million vehicles under its BMW, Mini and Rolls-Royce brands thanks to a 14.2 percent increase over 2010.

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

The BMW brand, the company's mainstay, sold 12.8 percent more cars and SUVs — a total of 1.38 million. Rolls-Royce increased unit sales by 30.5 percent with 3,538 cars sold worldwide, breaking a sales record from 1978.

BMW marketing chief Ian Robertson says it was "an outstanding year" for the company and forecast stronger sales ahead as a new version of the company's 3-Series boosts numbers in coming months. The 3-series goes on sale Feb. 11 worldwide.

Porsche on Monday reported a 22 percent sales increase to 118,867 vehicles.

Daimler AG on Jan. 5 reported record sales of 1.362 million for its Mercedes-Benz, smart and Maybach brands.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/18/2014 - 6:16am):

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