

Latest Altima Rolls Off TN Production Line

Erik Schelzig, Associated Press

SMYRNA, Tenn. (AP) — Nissan on Tuesday celebrated the newest version of the Altima sedan rolling off the line at its Smyrna assembly plant, marking the first of several upgrades to the Japanese automaker's first U.S. facility.

Bill Krueger, vice chairman of Nissan Americas, said at the ceremony that the company's new lithium ion battery plant is scheduled to open in September and that production of the latest model of the Pathfinder SUV will start the same month.

Production of the all-electric Leaf is set to begin at the plant in December, while assembly of the Rogue is set to come to Smyrna next year. It will be the first time the small SUV is made in the United States.

"You're going to be busy," Krueger told assembled managers and workers. "The team's going to busy launching these great products."

Production of the Frontier and Xterra will be moved to the company's Canton, Miss., plant, in August, Krueger said.

About 5,600 people work at the plant that first began production in 1983. Nissan's American headquarters are located in Franklin, just outside Nashville. The company also recently announced an expansion of its engine plant in Decherd, Tenn., that also makes motors for the Altima.

The Altima is Nissan's most successful model, accounting for nearly one out of every three cars the automaker sold last year.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam at the event said the latest version of the sedan should be able to make a run at knocking the Toyota Camry off its perch as the country's best-selling car. The Camry, which is was updated last fall, is made in neighboring Kentucky.

"If I happened to work at certain place in Georgetown, Ky., I would be rather nervous about holding on to that No. 1 ranking," Haslam said.

The Camry outsold the Altima by 40,000 vehicles last year.

The new Altima is scheduled to be available at dealerships in June, with prices starting at \$21,500 for the version with a 182-horsepower, 4-cylinder engine. The model featuring a 270-horsepower V6 engine carries a recommended price tag of \$30,080.

Officials said the new Altima gets 38 miles per gallon on the highway, up 20 percent from the old model and the best fuel economy of any gas-powered midsize car.

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The car has a sharper exterior and more luxurious interior. It also features a new hands-free system that connects to the driver's smartphone and new safety features like blind spot and backup warning systems.

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