Automakers Unveiling Cars For Recovering U.S. Market

The Associated Press

DETROIT, Jan. 14 (Kyodo) — Japan's Toyota Motor Corp. and Honda Motor Co. are among major players in an increasingly confident global car industry unveiling new models for the recovering U.S. market at the annual North American International Auto Show that opened Monday.

Manufacturers from Asia, Europe and the United States will be showcasing more than 50 new vehicles making either their world or North American debuts, with many highlighting environmentally friendly models, at the Detroit event, one of the world's biggest auto shows.

Focusing on concept cars and advanced technologies such as plug-in hybrids, Japanese automakers are expected to showcase their continued recovery from the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. The disaster triggered supply chain disruptions, leading to shortages of cars in the U.S.

Toyota Motor debuted its Furia sedan concept on Monday. The concept is intended to offer a glance toward the next generation of the Toyota Corolla, the company's No. 2 selling car in the United States after the Camry.

"Because young buyers are returning to the market at a faster rate than any generation, the next Corolla must have...improved styling that elicits surprise," Toyota Division General Manager Bill Fay said at the Furia unveiling.

Toyota's luxury brand will give a worldwide debut to the 2014 Lexus IS compact sports sedan on Tuesday.

Honda Motor Co. revealed its "Urban SUV Concept" on Monday. The small SUV concept is 9 inches shorter than Honda's CR-V and will launch in Japan at the end of 2013.

The automaker's luxury brand will display the Acura MDX luxury MDX prototype on Tuesday.

Nissan Motor Co. will present the Resonance concept on Tuesday, with "envelope-pushing" designs and hybrid-electric power train technology, and the 2014 Versa Note, a subcompact hatchback.

Nissan will also use the popular show to highlight the 2013 Nissan Leaf. The electric car is expected to charge nearly twice as fast as previous models and began production last week at the Smyrna plant in Tennessee.

Nissan's top-of-the-line Infiniti brand revealed the 2014 Q50 sports sedan on Monday. The Q50 is available in a hybrid model using Infiniti's Direct Response Hybrid System.

December "is a strong close for a year that had significant auto sales growth throughout," Edmunds.com Senior Analyst Jessica Caldwell said in a 2012 year-end press release.

The U.S. research company estimated that 1.36 million new cars were sold in December, bringing the 2012 total to 14.5 million new cars in the United States, a 13.5 percent increase from 2011 and the highest annual total since 2007.

Although worries remain about the U.S. economy, a last-minute deal averted the so-called "fiscal cliff" of automatic spending cuts and tax hikes set by Congress to kick in at the beginning of the year and auto industry analysts are optimistic about consumers in 2013.

"For car buyers whose personal financial houses are in order, 2013 is likely to offer the best economic environment for car-buying in the last five years," says Edmunds.com Chief Economist Dr. Lacey Plache. "Our economy is not out of the woods yet, but prudent consumers don't have to worry about the fiscal-cliff measures putting a crimp in their ability to buy the cars they need and want."

Fresh off historic December sales, the "Big 3" American automakers -- General Motors Co., Ford Motor Co. and Chrysler Group LLC -- are expected to make the most of their hometown show to inject further excitement into the market with their debuting cars.

GM revealed the 2014 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray, the seventh generation of the iconic sports car. The 2014 Corvette has been completely redesigned and has a new exterior and interior with an aluminum frame.

"The new Stingray is more all-new than the very first Corvette (60 years ago)," GM North America President Mark Reuss said Monday, adding the new Corvette is the most fuel-efficient yet.

GM will then unveil the 2014 Cadillac ELR on Tuesday, an all-electric luxury coupe based on the Converj concept, which it showed in the 2009 show. It will build the ELR at the same plant that produces the Chevrolet Volt, GM's other electric car.

"Cadillac customers are going to enjoy the unique features ELR will bring to the market. We're going to change the way people think about luxury and electrification," said ELR chief engineer Chris Thomason in a press release ahead of the show.

Ford will disclose a preview of the 2015 F-150 pickup truck on Tuesday and the concept may be 340 kilograms lighter than its predecessors. Some analysts see the early viewing as an example of the highly competitive American truck market.

Ford also revealed its Lincoln MKC luxury compact crossover on Monday. The small SUV, a first for the luxury brand, is a nod to the fast-growing segment.

Chrysler is focusing on their Jeep brand, which broke its own all-times total sales record in 2012 with over 700,000 vehicles sold. Jeep unveiled three 2014 models on Monday, including the Grand Cherokee with the new EcoDiesel V-6 engine.

The exhibition is open to the media Monday and Tuesday. It will open to the general public Jan. 19-27.

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