Corvette High-Performance Engines Moving To KY

Bruce Schreiner, Associated Press

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (AP) — General Motors will rev up engine production at the Kentucky plant that assembles Corvettes.

The automaker announced Wednesday it will build specialty, high-performance engines for the iconic sports car at its Bowling Green assembly plant, shifting the work from GM's Performance Build Center in Wixom, Mich. The transfer will add 20 jobs at the Bowling Green plant, where the work force is nearly 700.

The $3.5 million relocation to Kentucky comes on top of a $131 million investment announced in 2011 to build a new body shop and retool the Bowling Green plant for production of the next-generation Corvette. The all-new 2014 model is scheduled to reach dealers' show rooms by the third quarter of this year.

GM manufacturing manager Arvin Jones said the investments "reinforce our absolute faith in this facility and our unwavering commitment to this community."

"This is the home of the greatest sports car on the planet," he said, drawing cheers from plant workers who filled bleachers at the pep rally-like announcement at the sprawling plant in this south-central Kentucky city.

The relocation is slated for the first quarter of 2014. The announcement was part of a broader consolidation of GM Powertrain engineering sites.

Standard engines for Corvettes will still be made at a plant in Tonawanda, N.Y.

The Bowling Green plant is the only GM site that assembles Corvettes. The Kentucky plant currently does not make engines for the sports car.

"We're going to build a little more of that Corvette right here," Warren County Judge-Executive Mike Buchanon said of the new engine work.

Bowling Green plant manager Dave Tatman said it was too early to estimate how many engines will be built at the Kentucky plant.

GM said previously it planned to expand its work force by 250 jobs as part of the $131 million investment. About 150 of those jobs have been added, and the rest will be filled by summer, Tatman said after the event. The 20 jobs tied to the Performance Build Center are on top of that figure, he said.

The new investment is expected to be another tourism attraction for the city that prides itself as the home of the Corvette.

The Performance Build Center gives engine aficionados a chance to build the

engines for their own new Corvettes, under the watchful eyes of plant technicians. It's a hands-on experience that will shift from Michigan to Bowling Green.

"They'll assemble the pistons, they'll assemble the crank, they'll assemble the heads, they'll assemble the intake manifold to it, the exhaust," Tatman said in an interview. "They'll build the whole engine, do all the torques. ... What we want to do is offer the Corvette customer the entire experience."

Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear said the new addition will add to Bowling Green's appeal among Corvette fans who visit the plant and a nearby Corvette museum.

"It will significantly add to the economic growth of this whole region," he said in a video hookup.

Auto production ramped up in Kentucky last year, surpassing 1 million vehicles for the first time since 2007, before the national economic downturn. Kentucky ranked third in car production at 477,000 vehicles last year and fourth in light truck production at more than 548,000, the governor's office said recently.

Kentucky is also home to a Toyota plant at Georgetown, and Ford has two production plants in Louisville.

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