

Toyota Retakes Global Auto Sales Crown From GM

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Toyota has once again dethroned General Motors as the world's top-selling automaker.

The Japanese company sold 9.7 million cars and trucks worldwide in 2012, although it's still counting. GM sold 9.29 million.

Both companies saw higher sales, but Toyota's growth was far larger as it rolled out new versions of popular models like the Camry. GM executives promised sales growth this year, especially in the U.S. Both companies say publicly that they don't care about who wins, but concede that the crown is an important morale booster for employees.

GM was the top-selling carmaker for more than seven decades before losing the title to Toyota in 2008. But GM retook the sales crown in 2011 when Toyota's factories were slowed by an earthquake and tsunami in Japan. The disaster left Toyota dealers with few cars to sell. The company has since recovered.

Toyota's comeback from the earthquake, and flooding in Thailand, is only part of the story, says Jeff Schuster, senior vice president of forecasting for LMC Automotive, a Detroit-area industry forecasting firm. The company also has freshened up its stale midsize sedan, the Camry, the top-selling car in the United States.

GM's global sales rose 2.9 percent last year, it announced Monday at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. Toyota sales rose 22 percent.

Schuster expects Toyota to keep the lead over GM this year as it launches a new Corolla.

"I think that's going to be enough to keep them in their position," he says.

GM is also contending with a stronger Volkswagen. It narrowly edged out the fast-growing German company for second place in 2012. VW sold a record 9.1 million vehicles.

Volkswagen, with big sellers like the Passat midsize sedan and Jetta compact, closed in on GM with an 11 percent sales increase across the globe. The United States, where VW Group sales rose 34 percent, led the way.

Schuster expects GM to hold off Volkswagen in 2013. That's because VW has more of a presence in Europe, where sales are falling as the region struggles with high

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