

Toyota Sold Nearly 9.75M Vehicles Last Year

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TOKYO (AP) — Now it's official: Toyota is once again the world's top automaker.

Toyota Motor Corp. released its tally for global vehicle sales for last year Monday at a record 9.748 million vehicles — a bigger number than the estimate it gave last month of about 9.7 million vehicles.

It was already clear Toyota had dethroned General Motors Co. as the Detroit-based automaker fell short, selling 9.29 million vehicles.

GM had been the top-selling automaker for more than seven decades before losing the title to Toyota in 2008.

GM retook the sales crown in 2011, when Toyota's production was hurt by the quake and tsunami in northeastern Japan.

The latest results show Toyota's powerful comeback.

Global vehicle sales for the maker of the Camry sedan, Prius hybrid and Lexus luxury model surged nearly 23 percent from the previous year. Overseas sales jumped 19 percent, while sales in Japan, where the economy has been troubled, recovered a whopping 35 percent.

Volkswagen AG of Germany, the world's No. 3 automaker, sold a record 9.1 million vehicles around the world.

All three automakers play down the significance of the sales ranking and say they are focused on making attractive products.

"Rather than going after numbers, we hope to make fine products, one by one, to keep out customers satisfied. The numbers are just a result of our policy. And our policy will continue unchanged," said Toyota spokeswoman Shino Yamada.

Still, the recovery for Toyota is impressive. Like other Japanese automakers, Toyota's production was devastated by the March 2011 disasters, which disrupted supplies of crucial components. Flooding in Thailand, where Toyota has factories, also hurt car production.

Before that, it struggled against a crisis of massive recalls in the U.S. over defective floor mats, gas pedals and brakes, involving millions of vehicles, some recalled over and over, that hurt its reputation for quality.

Toyota officials have vowed to scrutinize quality, and have held back product development to minimize recalls.

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From the middle of last year, it was hit by another kind of problem — a widespread boycott of Japanese products, including Toyota cars, in China over a territorial dispute.

But sales growth in other parts of the world, including the U.S. and Asian nations such as Indonesia and India, was more than enough to offset such losses.

Toyota is planning to sell 9.91 million vehicles globally in 2013, putting it back on track toward its earlier goal of 10 million vehicles — a target that it had made a special effort to play down after its recall crisis.

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