

AL Honda Plant Celebrates Start Of MDX

The Associated Press

LINCOLN, Ala. (AP) — Gov. Robert Bentley joined Honda officials in Lincoln on Thursday to celebrate the start of production for the 2014 Acura MDX sports utility vehicle.

About 1,500 employees attended the ceremony Thursday. Honda officials said the automaker invested \$400 million and hired more than 400 people to support the production of the MDX. The Honda plant now employs more than 4,000 people.

Honda announced in 2011 that it would move production of the MDX from its Canadian plant in Alliston, Ontario, to Alabama. A model of the 2014 MDX debuted at the New York International Auto Show in March.

The Lincoln plant also makes the Odyssey minivan, Pilot SUV, and Ridgeline pickup.

AL.com reports (<http://bit.ly/11ZvVRH> [1]) that the redesigned MDX is the first Acura built in Alabama and the first luxury model for the 4,000-worker plant, which also produces the Odyssey minivan, Pilot SUV and Ridgeline pickup.

"Right now, we have our hands full with four...so we'll keep our focus on that," Tom Shoupe, head of Honda's Alabama operations, said. "But yes, it opens up additional possibilities for us."

The MDX is the most technologically-advanced vehicle to roll out of the plant. Honda has invested nearly \$400 million and added about 400 jobs in the past two years, in part to prepare for the new addition.

Building a luxury model, Shoupe said, adds a great element of flexibility for the plant and helps boost its reputation for quality. The MDX is Acura's top-selling model, and it also will be sold in China, a new export destination for Honda's Alabama plant.

Honda previously built the MDX at a plant in Canada.

Gov. Robert Bentley said he notices Alabama-made vehicles when he travels, and now he can add the MDX to that list.

"Everywhere I go now, when I see an Acura MDX, I will know that you made it, and that's something you should take pride in," he told employees.

The governor, who said he had driven the new MDX, credited the state's workers for helping him sell Alabama to industrial prospects.

"No company is any better than the people who work in that company," he said.

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The new MDX, which will go on sale in the coming weeks, is more aerodynamic than its predecessor, with a roomier interior and improved fuel economy.

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