

GM Aims New Chevy Cruze Diesel At VW Jetta

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The marketing people at Chevrolet make no secret of the goal for the new diesel version of the Chevrolet Cruze: Take sales from Volkswagen.

In fact, they're rolling out the car in 13 markets where VW sells the most diesel versions of its Jetta, another compact.

"Jetta owns the segment," concedes Phil Caruso, small-car marketing manager for the General Motors' Chevy brand. "We're looking to be a key competitor and take over some of that business."

Diesel cars attract buyers with high gas mileage, quick acceleration at any speed, and a long range between fill-ups. Last year, about 70 percent of the diesel cars sold nationwide were Volkswagens. VW sold 90,295 diesel cars in the U.S., and nearly 50,000 of those were Jettas.

Overall, diesel sales are growing. U.S. sales totaled almost 409,000 last year, up 41 percent from 2008, according to Wards AutoInfoBank. That includes trucks, which account for the bulk of diesel vehicles.

The Cruze is the only diesel car currently sold by any of the Detroit Three automakers. GM hasn't offered a diesel car for years. Its diesel engines of the past were noisy, smoky and had a reputation for lacking reliability.

Technology has made diesel-powered engines far quieter and cleaner. The Cruze, for instance, clatters a little at idle, but engine noise is barely noticeable at highway speeds due to a quiet motor and insulation. Exhaust smoke can hardly be seen.

Diesels usually are 20- to 30-percent more efficient than comparable gas-powered cars, which should offset the higher price of diesel fuel. Currently, diesel costs \$3.89 per gallon, 23 cents more than gasoline, according to AAA. The diesel Cruze, with its 2-liter, 151 horsepower motor, gets an estimated 46 miles per gallon on the highway, eight more than the gasoline version that most people buy.

The diesel Cruze, with its six-speed automatic transmission, beats an automatic Jetta diesel on the highway by four mpg. But the Jetta, with a 2-Liter, 140-horsepower engine, wins in the city, where its 30 mpg figure bests the Cruze by 3 mpg.

The Cruze starts at \$25,695 excluding shipping, while an automatic Jetta TDI starts at \$24,155. A premium Jetta automatic starts at \$25,595.

Caruso says GM has learned from its experience making diesels overseas. The company has sold more than 120,000 diesel Cruzes in other parts of the world since

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

the car hit markets in 2009. Most of the sales were in Europe, where in some countries half of all cars are diesels. The company also makes diesel motors for heavy-duty pickup trucks.

"There's not really a lot of kinks to work out," he said.

The startup markets for the diesel cruise are: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Houston, Dallas, St. Louis, Seattle, Milwaukee, Denver, Salt Lake City, Sacramento, Calif., Portland and Washington, D.C. The car will be available nationwide by the end of the year.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/30/2014 - 6:42am):

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