

# autotech

## daily™

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### WAGONER TO MANAGE GM NORTH AMERICA; LUTZ AND COWGER WILL FOCUS ON GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITIES

General Motors Corp. executives Bob Lutz and Gary Cowger are giving up their operational responsibilities for North America to focus on global product development and manufacturing duties, respectively. Chairman and CEO Rick Wagoner will take over day-to-day management of the company's ailing GM North America (GMNA) operations.

Lutz, 73, had been chairman of GMNA and Cowger was president. The pair will retain their corporate titles: Lutz is vice chairman and Cowger is group vice president.


GM says the move will shorten the lines of communication and decision making in North America. The 52-year-old Wagoner, who headed GMNA in the mid-1990s, is expected to continue to cut costs and try to jumpstart sluggish sales in the region. GM's U.S. sales in the first quarter were 5.1% below the same period in 2004.

Wagoner says Lutz asked for the change so he could focus exclusively upon product development. He championed a similar initiative last month that folded the company's regional product development operations into a single global unit. Under that structure, senior vice presidents John Smith, Jim Queen and Ed Welburn were given global responsibilities for product development, engineering and design. All three report to Lutz.

As GM's product czar, Lutz has steered development of the Pontiac GTO and G6 and Buick Lacrosse cars, all of which have struggled initially. But those vehicles were already in the works when Lutz joined GM in 2001. The first all-Lutz model will be the Pontiac Solstice, which is due later this year.

Cowger, who turns 58 later this month, is charged with spreading the automaker's flexible manufacturing system to facilities worldwide and optimizing global production efficiency and capacity. He also will oversee labor relations worldwide—thus will continue to be the point person in negotiations with the United Auto Workers union.

Wagoner notes GM began shifting to a global structure in many areas several years ago. He says the redefined job assignments should accelerate this process and better integrate product development and manufacturing/labor worldwide.



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## **FINANCIAL WOES CAUSE MORE GM DELAYS AND CANCEL-LATIONS**

General Motors Corp. has postponed the scheduled 2008 launch of the next-generation Cadillac SRX crossover vehicle due to ongoing financial problems, *Automotive News* reports. It says the delay was communicated to executives last month in the same memo that indicated the automaker was canceling North American plans for its rear-drive Zeta platform, which was widely reported at the time.

GM insists that the SRX will only be delayed a few months and that plans to freshen the interior with the 2007 model are still on track. The company already had decided to kill plans for a high-performance "V" version of the crossover vehicle, *AN* says.

The mid-March memo, which was sent by Vice Chairman Bob Lutz, cited the "current business situation" for a decision to scuttle right-hand-drive versions of the Buick Rainier, Chevrolet TrailBlazer, GMC Envoy and Saab 9-7X SUVs and canceling the planned mid-cycle facelift of the Hummer H2. The plan also will trim the number of concept and show vehicles and delay several specialty and high-performance models.

Lutz called the moves difficult product portfolio decisions that will let GM divert resources to help accelerate key high-volume product launches.

## **HONDA TARGETS CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS FROM JAPANESE FACTORIES**

Honda Motor Co. aims to curb carbon dioxide emissions from its Japanese plants 30% to 430,000 tons by fiscal 2010 vs. the levels it generated in fiscal 1990, reports the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*. The target is 3.5 times higher than the 8.6% reduction stipulated by the Japanese government under the Kyoto Protocol.

To help meet its goal, Honda plans to install a 24kW solar power system at its Suzuka plant this year. It also will switch from liquefied petroleum gas to the more environmentally friendly liquefied natural gas to run boilers for foundry and other processes at its Mooka plant next year, according to the newspaper. Honda plans to consolidate production lines and install more advanced monitoring systems throughout its Japanese facilities.

## **NEW DESIGN SLASHES ATV WHEEL BEARING REPLACEMENT TIME BY 75%**

Anchorage-based Phillips Enterprises LLC claims its new bearing system allows an all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) wheel bearing to be changed in 30 minutes vs. an average two hours for traditional assemblies. Bearings generally last about six months in the harsh Alaskan and Aleutian Islands terrain, where ATVs are a common form of daily transportation, the developer notes.

Although automobile wheel bearings rarely fail, the Phillips system also promises to save considerable replacement time when they do.

Dubbed "Speed Bearing," the system consists of a stainless steel (7D bar stock) insert that holds a standard stainless steel bearing, which in turn fits over a modified knuckle made of forged steel. Phillips also developed a socket tool that fits on a standard ratchet and is modified to accommodate the bearing configuration. The design allows bearings to be changed by removing only the wheel, eliminating the need to dismantle the brake housing and drum.

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The insert, which is about 3 inches in diameter for an ATV, also is said to improve load ratings and seal tightness. Phillips says better seals reduce grease leakage and prevent debris from entering the unit, thus virtually doubling the life of the bearing.

The new bearing system, which requires only slight modification to the knuckle to accept the insert, is designed to work with existing components and current manufacturing processes. Phillips has a patent pending for the technology and hopes to have it ready for commercialization within 18 months. Established in 2003 specifically to develop the technology, the company plans to license or sell the rights to it in the future.

### **MERCEDES DEBUTS RETROFIT PARTICULATE FILTER**

Starting this fall, DaimlerChrysler AG's Mercedes-Benz unit will offer a retrofit particulate filter package for its diesel-powered cars and trucks. The system will initially be available through authorized Mercedes repair shops for C- and E-Class models.

The automaker expects interest in the retrofit unit to take off once tax incentives for such systems are finalized in Germany. It describes the system as being consistent, reliable and easy to install.

Unlike some competitive technologies, the Mercedes filter is maintenance-free and doesn't require the use of additives. Captured soot is burned, and the filter is regenerated by controlled combustion of the filtered particles at regular intervals.

Last month, Mercedes announced it would make particulate filters standard on all diesel vehicles this summer in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland. It has been offering a diesel particulate filter as part of a Euro 4-compliant exhaust unit since late 2003. More than 130,000 filter-equipped Mercedes passenger vehicles have already been delivered in Germany alone.

For commercial vehicles, Euro 4- and Euro 5-compliant filters are available. Euro 5 standards, which don't begin until October 2009 for 3.5-ton vehicles, lower the level of nitrogen oxide emissions allowed by 60% and particle emissions by 80%. Mercedes says nine out of 10 customers are ordering vehicles with the Euro 5 system.

### **HONDA POWER SWEEPS IRL'S FIRST GRAND PRIX**

The first street race in the history of the Indy Racing league's IndyCar Series was dominated by Honda Motor Co. on Sunday. Honda supplied the engines to the top five finishers at the inaugural race in St Petersburg, which fittingly is named the Honda Grand Prix.

Led by winner Dan Wheldon, the top four drivers all drove for the Andretti Green Racing team. Next across the line was Tony Kanaan, followed by Dario Franchitti (who set fastest lap) and Bryan Herta. Fifth place finisher Vitor Meira is part of Rahal Letterman Racing. The top Toyota and Chevrolet-powered vehicles were piloted by Scott Dixon (6th) and Thomas Enge (16th), respectively.

The victory was the second of the season for Wheldon, moving him to the top of the IndyCar standings after three races. Running in third after 92 of 100 laps, Wheldon raced to the front of the pack when leaders Kanaan and rookie Ryan Briscoe bumped each other following the fifth and final restart of the 180-mile race. Briscoe, a former Formula One test driver, led a race-high 43 laps but finished 14th after the late collision.

Polesetter Herta had a strong first half of the race but fell back after delivering over-steer problems.