AUTOGRAPHIC'S
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Monthly News for the Automotive Enthusiast working in the Automotive Repair Industry.

Industry Stats and Trends

Collision repairers seeing fewer totals, longer backlogs of work, more hours per repair job

By John Yoswick

Wondering how what you're seeing at your shop compares to others? Curious about what's happening within the industry as a whole? Here's our annual round-up of some collision industry stats and trends.

Shop population stable

Consolidation advocates often talk about how dramatically the total number of body shops in the United States has declined, and how that pace of decline will only accelerate in the coming years. The statistics don't back that up, however.

The latest Census Bureau data shows the total number of independent (non-dealer) collision repair facilities in the United States stood at 35,306 in 2019, essentially unchanged over the prior two years. The number of independent repair facilities peaked in 2005 at 36,529. The recession, however, caused that count to fall by more than 3,000 to a low of 33,386 in 2011. In the years since, the opening of new independent repair facilities has put the industry back to within about 1,200 shop locations of the all-time high.

Looking at the change over the prior 10 years of data, Colorado (up 34 percent) and Texas (up 20 percent) topped the list for highest percentage growth in their body shop population from 2009 to 2019. Third-place Florida, with an 18 percent increase in shop count over the 10 years, has now posted nine years of consecutive growth in shop numbers.

The changes in shop count over the 10 years in other states were: up 3.1 percent in Alabama, down 1.3 percent in Mississippi, virtually no change in Arkansas, up 3 percent in Georgia, down 1.2 percent in Kentucky, up 5.9 percent in Louisiana, up 3.5 percent in Missouri, up 5.9 percent in North Carolina, down 3.3 percent in South Carolina, up 2.1 percent in Tennessee, and up 5.4 percent in Virginia.

Commercial van repairs proving to be lucrative

The pandemic fueled a big jump in the rate of home-delivery of goods, something that was already on the rise thanks to Amazon. That means far more commercial vehicles on the road. Almost two in five shops (38 percent) last spring said they routinely work on commercial vans like the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter, Ford Transit and Dodge Ram Pro Master. And while over half of shops say those vehicles take a little longer to repair than typical passenger vehicles, the higher average labor rates shops are getting to repair them make an attractive business proposition.

About a quarter of shops surveyed said they charge different labor rates depending on which brand of van they are repairing, but most (74 percent) say they charge the same rate no matter the brand of van. Those rates are notably higher than the rates reported for regular passenger vehicles. On average, shops reported billing $66 per hour for body work on commercial vans compared to a national average regular body rate around $55. Refinish rates are $64 compared to $52 per hour, and even mechanical rates, which are much higher

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Tech Tips: Traverse, Camaro, RAM 2500 problems

By ALLDATA Tech-Assist Team

Here's a compilation of some of the "Tech Tips" ALLDATA compiles as its Tech-Assist Team helps technicians tackle vehicle issues. More detail on these tips — including marked-up schematics, images and recommendations — are searchable in the "ALLDATA Community" (https://www.alldata.com/alldata-community).

Chevy Traverse brakes drag, hill-start assist won't release

Problem: The owner of a 2013 Chevy Traverse (AWD, V6-3.6L, automatic transmission/transaxle) with 123,764 miles said that the hill-start assist system would not release the brakes after stopping on a hill and trying to accelerate. The hill-start assist system is designed to temporarily hold the brakes on while stopped on a hill until the driver can release the brake pedal and push on the accelerator pedal.

Details: The technician connected a scan tool and found no diagnostic trouble codes. He also verified that the vehicle did have the hill-start assist feature. The rear brake shoes were worn out, so he replaced them. He also replaced the electronic brake control module (EBCM). Unfortunately, that did not fix the problem.

A Tech-Assist consultant asked the technician to verify brake switch input to the EBCM. He also advised him to open front and rear brake bleeder valves one at a time to see if the brakes released.

The technician verified there was brake switch input and that the brakes would release if a bleeder valve was opened. Testing pointed to an ABS hydraulic solenoid valve sticking in the ON position. It is part

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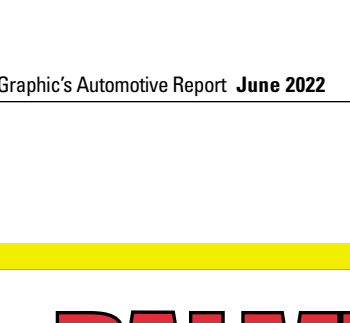
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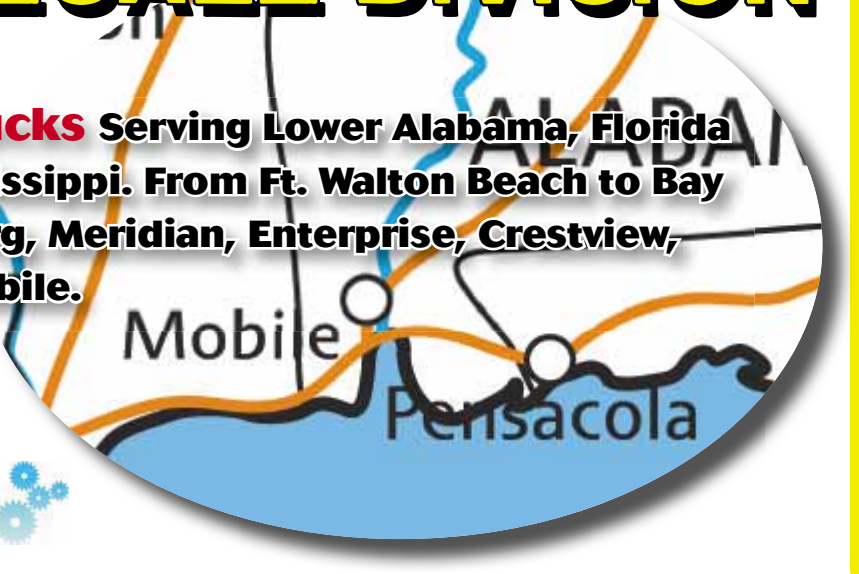
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Nearly 43,000 people died on US roads last year

By Tom Krisher & Hope Yen

DETROIT — Nearly 43,000 people were killed on U.S. roads last year, the highest number in 16 years as Americans returned to the roads after the coronavirus pandemic forced many to stay at home.

The 10.5% jump over 2020 numbers was the largest percentage increase since the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began its fatality data collection system in 1975. Exacerbating the problem was a persistence of risky driving behaviors during the pandemic, such as speeding and less frequent use of seat belts, as people began to venture out more in 2021 for out-of-state and other road trips, analysts said.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said America faces a crisis on its roads. The safety administration urged state and local governments, drivers and safety advocates to join in an effort to reverse the rising death trend.

"Our nation has taken a dangerous and deadly step backwards in traffic safety and impaired driving," said MADD National President Alex Otte, who urged strong public-private efforts akin to the seat belt and air bag public safety campaigns of the 1990s to stem reckless driving. "More families and more communities are feeling the crushing magnitude of this crisis on our roads."

Preliminary figures released by the agency show that 42,915 people died in traffic crashes last year, up from 38,824 in 2020. Final figures will be released in the fall.

Forty-four states as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico had increases in traffic deaths in 2021 compared to the previous year, led by Texas, California and Florida. Posting declines were Wyoming, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Maryland and Maine. Rhode Island's figures were unchanged.

Americans drove about 325 billion more miles last year, 11.2% higher than in 2020, which contributed to the increase.

Nearly 118 people died in U.S. traffic crashes every day last year, according to the agency's figures. The Governors Highway Safety Association, a group of state traffic safety officials, blamed the increase on dangerous behavior such as speeding, driving while impaired by alcohol and drugs, and distracted driving, as well as "roads designed for speed instead of safety."

The combination, the group said, "has wiped out a decade and a half of progress in reducing traffic crashes, injuries and deaths."

Nearly 118 people died in U.S. traffic crashes every day last year, according to the agency's figures.

Deaths last year increased in almost all types of crashes, NHTSA reported. Crashes occurring during out of state travel jumped 15%, compared to 2020, many of them on rural interstate roads or access roads off city highways. Fatalities in urban areas and deaths in multi-vehicle crashes each rose 16%. Pedestrian deaths were up 13%.

By age, fatalities among drivers 65 and older rose 14%, reversing a declining trend seen among them in 2020. Deaths also surged among middle-aged drivers, led by those 35-to-44, which rose 15%. Kids under age 16 saw traffic fatalities increase 6%.

By vehicle, fatalities involving at least one big truck were up 13%, while motorcycle deaths were up 9% and deaths of bicyclists rose 5%. Fatalities involving speeding drivers and deaths in alcohol-related crashes each were up 5%.

Government estimates show the rate of road deaths declined slightly from 2020. Last year there were 1.33 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, compared with 1.34 in 2020. The fatality rate rose in the first quarter of last year, but declined the rest of the year, NHTSA said.

Traffic deaths began to spike in 2020. NHTSA has blamed reckless driving behavior for increases during the pandemic, citing behavioral research showing that speeding and traveling without a seat belt have been higher. Before 2020, the number of fatalities had fallen for three straight years.

Deputy NHTSA Administrator Steven Cliff, the Biden administration's nominee to run the agency, said the roadway crisis is urgent and preventable. "We will redouble our safety efforts, and we need everyone — state and local governments, safety advocates, automakers and drivers, to join us," Cliff said in a statement. "All of our lives depend on it."

Buttigieg pointed to a national strategy unveiled earlier this year aimed at reversing the trend. He said earlier that over the next two years his department will provide federal guidance as well as billions in grants under President Joe Biden's new infrastructure law to spur states and localities to lower speed limits and embrace safer road design such as dedicated bike and bus lanes, better lighting and crosswalks. The strategy also urges the use of speed cameras, which the department says could provide more equitable enforcement than police traffic stops.

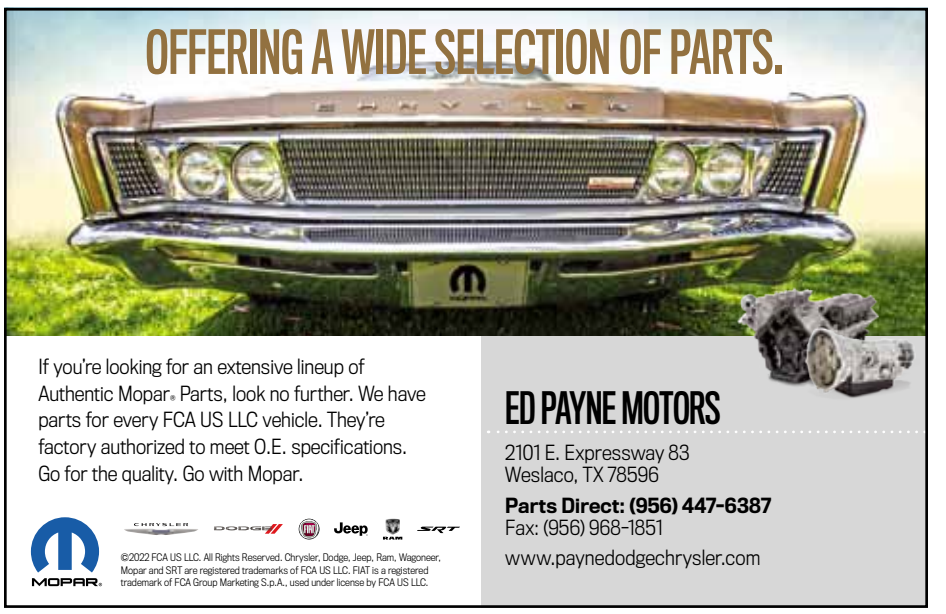
In the statement, the department said it opened up its first round of applications for the program, which will spend up to $6 billion over five years on local efforts to cut crashes and deaths.

The Transportation Department is moving in the right direction to stem the increase in deaths, but it will take years for many of the steps to work, said Michael Brooks, acting executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety.

NHTSA, for instance, has regulations pending to require electronic automatic emergency braking and pedestrian detection systems on all new light vehicles, and to require automatic emergency braking on heavy trucks, he said. Automatic emergency braking can slow or stop a vehicle if there's an object in its path.

The agency also is requiring automakers to install systems that alert rear-seat passengers if their safety belts aren't buckled.

"Responding to this is difficult," Brooks said. "It takes a lot of work on a lot of different strategies to address these issues. They've got a lot of work on their hands." *(AP)* ■





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Editor
Barry L. Forkum
autoreport88@gmail.com

Publisher / Advertising Director
Garnett Forkum

IT & Art Director
Allen Forkum

Copy Editor
Tom Williams

Contributors
John Yoswick, Jay Hirsch,
Richard Diegle, Robert Bravender,
Tom Williams

Advertising Sales
Marj Pierce
Phone: (901) 466-0903
Cell: (901) 497-0926
marj@automotivereport.net

Tom Williams
Phone: (615) 757-3042
Fax: (888) 607-0921
twill@automotivereport.net

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Industry conference discusses parts supply chain, HR issues

By John Yoswick

A recent Collision Industry Conference (CIC) committee presentation confirmed that parts supply chain issues continue to plague collision repairers. A poll of repairers in the room at CIC in Phoenix found that about one-third said parts-related issues lead them to delay scheduling about 40 percent of jobs. Another one in four said parts issues lead to delayed scheduling 60 percent of the time, and almost an equal number said it was 80 percent of the time.

Greg Horn of PartsTrader said his company's data indicates the median number of days for parts deliveries was fairly stable over 2021.

"What's changed is the number of outliers, the number of delays for individual components, which has increased pretty radically," Horn said, reaching 14.7 days in December, up from 7.4 days in February and March of last year.

He said if some relief from the microchip shortage enables automakers to ramp up production this year, that should reduce used vehicle values, putting more of those vehicles into the recycled parts supply chain.

"It is probably the latter half of this year when we start to see some relief on both OEM and the recycled parts side," Horn said.

Still-elevated transportation costs, however, have non-OEM parts manufacturers in Taiwan rethinking what they ship.

"Should I put in one bumper cover that would take up the space of 10 headlight units, or do I ship those 10 headlights at a bigger margin," Horn said. "So in the short term, I think we're going to see [shortages or] price increases on larger aftermarket components."

The committee asked repairers at the meeting what they are doing to address parts issues. A majority (70 percent) said one response has been to return more vehicles to customers with cosmetic parts still on order. Nearly two in five said that's happening with 30 percent or more of the cars they repair.

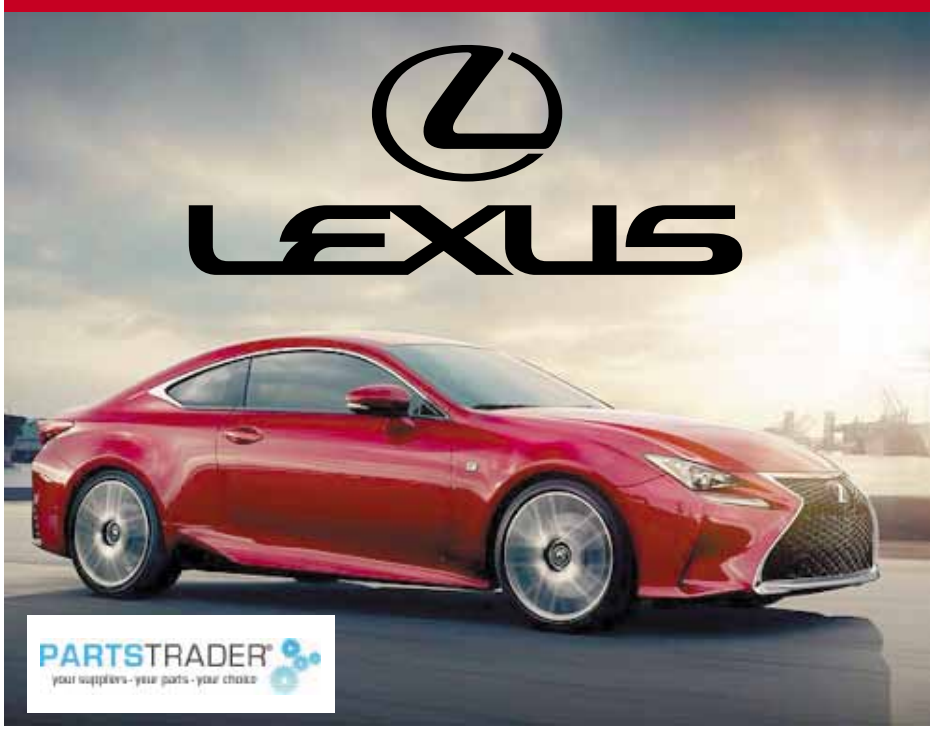
But Matt Radman of Coach Works Auto Body in Mesa, Arizona, noted that solution is not without its own challenges.

"We had a [Hyundai] Sonata that we couldn't get the side garnish that goes from the bottom of the door and across the wheel well," Radman said. "Right behind that is an exposed hole and unless you seal it somehow, moisture is getting behind there. So you have to address this on a case-by-case basis."

Something as simple as a missing window molding could allow moisture to get into the door, he said, noting that returning unfinished vehicles requires thinking through these issues and making sure

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... stats and trends

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on passenger vehicles (averaging $85 in 2020) are even more so for commercial van work, averaging $101 per hour for mechanical labor.

Keep in mind that even those rates are a year old, with inflation picking up over the past 12 months. The data comes from the "Who Pays for What?" surveys (www.crashnetwork.com/collisionadvice). Shop trainer Mike Anderson of Collision Advice, who conducts the surveys with CRASH Network, said he is always on the look-out for ideas that can bring shops new or more lucrative sources of additional revenue.

"With Amazon's growth and the introduction of the Rivian van, we expect to see this segment of the industry continue to grow in the future," Anderson said.

Shops waiting longer for insurer reviews

Three in five shops surveyed in the closing weeks of 2021 said insurers continued to conduct all claims work remotely, an even higher percentage than said that six months earlier. About one in four survey respondents (23 percent) said in-shop inspections by insurers were up somewhat, but only 14 percent said they were seeing adjusters in-person at the same rate they were pre-pandemic.

If it feels like it's taking you more time to get those remote supplement approvals (desk reviews), you're not alone. Shops appear to be waiting longer for such reviews than they were prior to the pandemic, with about a quarter of shops reporting in mid-2021 that two major insurers, Allstate and State Farm, were typically taking more than five days to get back to them.

Before the pandemic, it was normal for 90 percent of shops to get a response from those insurers in less than five days. In Allstate's case, less than 10 percent of shops in 2019 said it took more than five days to get a response, and over a third (34 percent) reported response times in under two days. To Allstate's credit, 28 percent of shops last summer were still reporting quick turnaround times with Allstate.

"I've noticed that desk reviews are more prompt than I have seen in the past," one shop owner in Mississippi said. "Allstate, for example, with Virtual Assist, is instantaneous. State Farm has improved from 2-3 days to same day or one day."

But that shop owner's experience wasn't echoed in the overall "Who Pays for What?" survey data last summer, which showed that less than 12 percent of shops reported that State Farm is getting back to them in under two days; overall, shops reported that the average wait time for State Farm was four days. Allstate was slightly better at 3.4 days. Insurers with the quickest response times were Geico and Progressive, both with average response times for remote reviews of around 2.5 days.

Large MSOs capturing more DRP work

Data from CCC Intelligent Solutions confirms that the largest MSOs are capturing a significant portion of direct repair work, particularly among the largest auto insurers. Back in 2008, national MSOs — which CCC defines as those having 25 or more shop locations — accounted for just under 11 percent of uploaded DRP appraisals. By last year, that had grown nearly four-fold to about 43 percent.

Three in five shops surveyed in the closing weeks of 2021 said insurers continued to conduct all claims work remotely, an even higher percentage than said that six months earlier.

When DRP appraisals are segmented into two groups — those from the top 25 personal auto insurers versus all the other insurers — independent shops accounted for about 64 percent of DRP appraisals for the carriers outside the top 25, but just 44 percent of the appraisals for the largest 25 insurers.

Those 25 insurers together account for more than 87 percent of the total personal auto insurance market.

Total losses actually decline

Year-end 2021 data from CCC offered one potential surprise: Despite rising overall repair costs, the percentage of vehicles being declared total losses actually fell slightly in 2021, after rising steadily since 2013.

About 19.6 percent of all claims resulted in a total loss last year. That was slightly higher than the percentage in 2019 (19.2 percent) but down a full percentage point from 2020.

"Used car values are soaring," Dan Risley of CCC said in January of this year, though there's been some cooling in pricing since then. Higher repair costs haven't so far fueled a rise in total losses thanks to "used car values outpacing or equaling the cost of repairing the vehicle," he said.

Wider trends mean DRP KPIs have declined

There's been discussion within the industry about the need for insurers to adjust key performance indicators (KPIs) metrics for direct repair claims, and that seems supported by other CCC data.

Average repair costs rose 8 percent in 2021, about 1 percentage point higher than U.S. inflation overall; the average part cost across all part types (OEM and aftermarket) was also up 8 percent last year, the "largest annual increase we have seen" since CCC began reporting that data in 1997, according to CCC's Susanna Gotsch.

Average total labor hours per repairable non-comprehensive claim grew slowly from 2011 (23 hours per claim) through 2019 (23.9 hours), but then jumped to 24.7 hours in 2020, and to 25.8 hours last year. Gotsch said the pre-pandemic growth was related to vehicle complexity, but the larger increase in the last two years is based in part on the increase in the percentage of non-drivable claims. Compared to 2019, there was more than a full percentage point jump in DRP claims with repair costs above $10,000 in 2021, and a 2.5 percentage point jump in claims between $5,000 and $10,000.

That also results in longer cycle times, Gotsch said.

"For each $1,000 increment, we essentially see an additional two full days in the overall repair time, or keys to keys time," she said. "Industry wide, DRP repairs are now taking over 12 days, two full days above where they were in 2020, and a little less than two full days longer than they were in 2019. By the time we get to a $10,000 or higher repair, the average repair time exceeds 35 days."

Lastly, Gotsch said the change in the mix of repair job sizes, coupled with technician shortages and absences related to the pandemic, have consistently lowered labor hours per repair day for both drivable and non-drivable jobs. The three-hours-per-day average for non-drivable vehicles back in 2017 and 2018, for example, has declined since then, with the quarterly averages in 2021 ranging between 1.9 and 2.5 hours.

Average shop backlog hits record level

Anyone wanting collision work done right away this past winter may have had to call more than 100 shops before finding one that could start work immediately. The average scheduling backlog jumped to more than a month this past January, reaching an average of 4.5 weeks nationally. That is more than a week longer than the previous quarter's record-high backlog, and almost 2.5 times the length of the typical first quarter backlog. Since 2017, the average backlog for the first quarter has been just under two weeks.

A record 84 percent of shops last month said they were scheduling new work two weeks or more into the future, and more than half of all shops (52 percent) said they were scheduling more than four weeks out. Less than 1 percent of the nearly 500 shops from 49 states responding to the January survey said they could schedule new work immediately. About 15 percent of shops reported a backlog of more than eight weeks.

The longest backlogs were in the Mid-Atlantic states where the average was 5.4 weeks. The South was close to that, at 5.3 weeks, and the Midwest was reporting a 4.9-week average backlog. ▪

John Yoswick, a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore., who has been writing about the automotive industry since 1988, is also the editor of the weekly CRASH Network bulletin (www.CrashNetwork.com). He can be contacted by email at john@CrashNetwork.com.



Court hearing: Did Biden legally suspend oil lease sales?

By Janet McConnaughey

NEW ORLEANS — A federal appeals court in New Orleans heard arguments on Tuesday, May 10, 2022 about whether President Joe Biden legally suspended new oil and gas lease sales shortly after taking office because of climate change worries.

The case has not been tried but a federal judge blocked the order, saying only Congress could suspend the sales.

Federal lawyers say the government has broad power to hold, cancel or defer lease sales.

Biden's order was "a straightforward articulation of the President's views as to how Interior should use the ample discretion Congress has granted the agency," Andrew M. Bernie and other attorneys wrote.

U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty in Monroe had no authority to review Biden's order because the president is not an "agency" subject to the Administrative Procedure Act, they wrote.

Doughty found that states which challenged the order were likely to prove that the Interior Department violated that law by acting arbitrarily and without giving "any rational explanation." He also found that since laws governing the lease sales don't say the president can "pause" them, only Congress may do so.

Lawyers for Louisiana and a dozen other states say a 1987 law setting out how to sell oil and gas leases requires such sales at least four times a year in states with eligible land.

"But with the stroke of a pen just a week after he took his oath of office, President Biden put his campaign promises above federal law: By executive fiat, he halted oil and gas leasing on federal lands," said the brief by attorneys led by Louisiana Solicitor General Elizabeth B. Murrill, the top constitutional lawyer in the Louisiana Attorney General's Office.

Louisiana is joined in the suit by Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and West Virginia

After Doughty ruled for the states, the Interior Department held an offshore lease sale — which a federal judge in Washington canceled. Four onshore lease sales are scheduled next month — for land in Nevada on June 14; New Mexico, Oklahoma and Colorado on June 16; Wyoming on June 22 and Utah, Montana and North Dakota on June 28.

U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty in Monroe had no authority to review Biden's order because the president is not an "agency" subject to the Administrative Procedure Act, they wrote.

However, the administration scaled back the amount of land originally on offer and raised royalty rates 50 percent from 12.5% to 18.75%. That's the amount charged for desirable deep water offshore leases, while those in less than 656 feet (200 meters) of water are charged the 12.5% minimum.

Biden has come under pressure to increase U.S. crude production as fuel prices spike because of the coronavirus pandemic and war in Ukraine. From within his own party, the Democrat faces calls to do more to curb emissions from fossil fuels that are driving climate change.

Oil companies have been reluctant to ramp up, saying there are not enough workers, scant money for new drilling investments and wariness that today's high prices won't last. *(AP)* ▪

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Recalls

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CHRYSLER FCA is recalling 931 2021 – 2022 Dodge Durango and 2022 Jeep Grand Cherokee vehicles to replace the steering gear assembly. The original gears may have been built with a steering gear rack that was insufficiently hardened, which could cause loss of steering.

FORD Motor is recalling 310,203 2016 F-250, F-350, F-450, and F550 trucks to replace the steering wheel clock spring. The spring could, due to dust accumulation, cause a disconnect that would not allow the driver's airbag to deploy.

KIA Motors America is recalling 9,014 Kia vehicles and 10,729 Hyundai vehicles to correct a software error that could cause the shifter control unit to disengage the parking mechanism, which could allow the vehicle to roll away. Drivers are asked to park the vehicle on level ground until the remedy has been performed.

Kia is recalling 2,761 2022 Telluride vehicles to replace the instrument cluster assembly. The original cluster could be blank at times due to a faulty circuit board.

MERCEDES-BENZ USA is recalling 292,287 2006 – 2012 ML Class and GL Class vehicles to inspect and possibly replace the brake booster. The booster could accumulate moisture, and over time corrosion could form inside the booster, causing brake failure. Owners are advised not to drive the vehicles until the remedy has been performed.

Mercedes-Benz is recalling 9,156 2021 and 2022 EOS and S series vehicles to update a software error that could disable the rear turn signal, hazard lights, and reverse lights.

VOLKSWAGEN Group of America is recalling 4,269 2022 Golf GTI and Golf R vehicles to remove the engine design cover, which could become loose in certain driving conditions. Dealers will provide an updated design cover when they become available.

Hyundai recalls cars for exploding seat belt parts

WASHINGTON — Hyundai is recalling 239,000 cars in the U.S. because the seat belt pretensioners can explode and injure vehicle occupants. Three injuries have been reported, two in the U.S. and one in Singapore.

In a letter to the Korean automaker, government regulators said that the driver's and front passenger's seat belt pretensioners can explode upon deployment and send shrapnel throughout the vehicle. Pretensioners tighten the belts in preparation for a crash.

The recall, which expands and replaces three previous recalls, includes 2019-2022 Accents, 2021-2023 Elantras and 2021-2022 Elantra HEVs, or hybrid electric vehicles. Vehicles repaired under the previous recalls will need to be brought to dealerships again for the new remedy.

Owners will be able to take their recalled vehicles to dealerships where the seat belt pretensioners will be fit with a cap at no cost. Hyundai is expected to notify owners by July 15, the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration said. *(AP)* ▪

Tesla recalls 130K vehicles; touch screens issue

DETROIT — Tesla is recalling about 130,000 vehicles across its U.S. model lineup because their touch screens can overheat and go blank.

The recalls covers certain Model S sedan and Model X SUVs from 2021 and 2022, as well as Model 3 cars and Model Y SUVs from 2022.

Documents posted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration say that during the fast-charging process, the central processing computers may not cool sufficiently. That can cause the computer to lag or restart, making the center screen run slowly or appear blank. Without the center screen, the cars can lose rearview camera displays, settings that control windshield defrosters and indicators that say whether the cars are in drive, neutral and reverse. That can increase the risk of a crash.

Tesla is fixing the problem with online software updates that will improve temperature management for the computer. Updates began on May 3. *(AP)* ▪

Ford recalls Explorer that can roll away

DETROIT — Ford Motor Co. is recalling more than a quarter-million Explorer SUVs in the U.S. because they can roll away unexpectedly while shifted into park.

The recall covers certain 2020 through 2022 Explorers with 2.3-liter engines, as well as 3-liter and 3.3-liter hybrids and the 3-liter ST. Also included are 2020 and 2021 Explorer Police hybrids and those with 3.3-liter gas engines.

Documents posted by U.S. safety regulators say that a rear axle mounting bolt can fracture and cause the drive shaft to disconnect. If that happens, the SUVs can roll away even if they are placed in park gear, without the parking brake on. The documents say Ford has 235 warranty claims due to the problem. The company says it knows of no crashes or injuries. Depending on the model, dealers will replace a bushing and the axle cover, or they will update electronic parking brake software. Owners will be notified by mail starting June 6. *(AP)* ▪

Park outdoors: Ford recalls SUVs due to engine fire risks

By AP Wire Service

DETROIT — Ford is asking the owners of 350,000 vehicles to take them to dealers for repairs in three recalls, including about 39,000 that should be parked outdoors because the engines can catch fire.

Ford says in U.S. government documents posted late last month that it doesn't know what's causing fires in some 2021 Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator SUVs.

But the company says fires can happen even while the engines are off. Ford has reports of 16 fires under the hood, 14 in rental company vehicles. One person was burned. It's recommending that the SUVs be parked outdoors and away from buildings. So far it hasn't developed a repair for the fires, which appear to start at the back of the engine compartment on the passenger side.

Of the 16 fires, 12 happened while the SUV engines were turned off, Ford said in a prepared statement. The company says it has no reports of fires extending to any buildings.

Ford says it's not instructing owners to stop driving the SUVs, although those who might not be able to follow the park outdoors instructions should contact their dealer or the company.

Ford says it's treating the recall urgently and will use apps and mail to notify customers as soon as it develops a list of vehicle owners and addresses.

"We are working around the clock to determine the root cause of this issue and subsequent remedy so that customers can continue to enjoy using their vehicles," Jeffrey Marentic, general manager of Ford passenger vehicles, said in a statement.

Ford began investigating fire reports on March 24. It says the fires appear to be limited to SUVs built from Dec. 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021. The company says it has no fire reports from vehicles built before or after those dates.

The automaker also is recalling about 310,000 heavy-duty trucks because the driver's air bag may not inflate in a crash.

The recall covers certain 2016 F-250, 350, 450 and 550 trucks. Dust can get into the air bag wiring in the steering wheel, disconnecting the electricity. Dealers will replace steering wheel wiring. Owners will be notified by mail starting July 5.

And the company is recalling 464 electric Mustang Mach-E SUVs from 2021. A software problem can cause unintended acceleration, deceleration or a loss of drive power in all-wheel-drive vehicles.

Ford says in documents posted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that the powertrain control computer may not detect a software error. The problem will be fixed by dealers or by an online software update. Owners were to be notified by letter around May 30. *(AP)* ▪

Mercedes tells owners of 292K vehicles to stop driving them

DETROIT — Mercedes-Benz is telling the owners of more than 292,000 vehicles in the U.S. to stop driving them due to a problem that could cause the brakes to fail.

The German automaker is recalling the vehicles and says it will offer free towing so the owners can get them to a dealership for service. The recall covers certain ML, GL and R-Class vehicles from the 2006 through 2012 model years.

Mercedes says in documents posted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that moisture can get into a brake booster housing and cause corrosion. That can cause a vacuum leak, which would decrease brake performance.

In rare cases, hard braking could cause mechanical damage to the booster, and it may not be possible to stop the vehicles with the brake pedal, Mercedes said in a recent statement A foot-activated parking brake would still work.

The company says it has no reports of crashes or injuries.

Dealers will remove a rubber sleeve and inspect the booster, replacing parts as needed. Owners are notified by letter starting May 27. *(AP)* ▪

Hyundai recalls 215K Sonatas; hoses can leak fuel

DETROIT — Hyundai is recalling more than 215,000 midsize cars in the U.S. — most for a second time — because fuel hoses can leak in the engine compartment and cause fires.

The recall covers certain 2013 and 2014 Sonata sedans, many of which were recalled for the same problem in 2020.

The Korean automaker says in documents posted by U.S. safety regulators that a low pressure fuel hose can crack over time due to heat from the engine. That can cause fuel leaks and increase the risk of a fire.

In the 2020 recall, dealers inspected the hoses and replaced them if they were damaged. If not, heat-resistant tape was installed. This time all of the faulty hoses will be replaced.

Hyundai says in documents that it has 138 reports of problems in the U.S., but no confirmed crashes, fires or injuries.

Owners will be notified starting July 5. *(AP)* ▪

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Dodge uncovers hot new appearance for brand's three-row muscle car: Dodge Durango R/T HEMI® Orange

By Stalantis Press Release

Auburn Hills, Mich. - The Dodge brand's three-row muscle car will sport a new look this summer: HEMI® Orange. First introduced last year for the Dodge Challenger and Dodge Charger, the popular appearance is now available for the 2022 Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange.

"HEMI Orange is a hot option for the Dodge Challenger and Charger, and now we're expanding its reach by offering the Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange," said Tim Kuniskis, Dodge brand chief executive officer - Stellantis. "The Durango has a muscle-car attitude, and the eye-catching HEMI Orange appearance embraces the Dodge performance DNA that is our foundation."

The Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange appearance is inspired by the original orange color of the iconic HEMI engine that powered Dodge muscle cars for decades; the Durango R/T is fueled by the 5.7-liter HEMI V-8 engine.

The Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange stands out with unique orange and Gunmetal hood stripes, which complement the new-look Midnight Grey and orange exterior badging. The rear receives a Satin Black taillamp, while the Durango R/T HEMI Orange rolls on painted finish 20-inch Black Noise wheels. HEMI Orange is available on all Durango R/T exterior colors: Destroyer Grey, Diamond Black, Octane Red and White Knuckle.

All three rows of seats, including the SRT front seats and second-row captain's chairs, are trimmed in orange stitching, with a monochromatic Dodge Rhombi seatback logo. Orange stitching runs throughout the interior, accenting the instrument panel, door uppers and armrest, console lid, shifter boot and leather flat-bottom steering wheel.

Two packages are available for those seeking to add a full menu of content to the Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange: HEMI Orange Plus Package and HEMI Orange Tow N Go Package options.

The HEMI Orange Plus Package adds features including a power sunroof, 19-speaker Harman Kardon sound system, advanced safety features and much more. The HEMI Orange Tow N Go Package, available only for all-wheel-drive vehicles, adds advanced towing features, 20-inch Lights Out wheels, orange Brembo brake calipers, Bilstein high performance suspension, and additional features and content.

The Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange is available for order now through dealerships, with a U.S. manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) of $1,995 to add the HEMI Orange appearance. Optional HEMI Orange Plus and HEMI Orange Tow N Go packages are available at MSRPs of $4,500 and $5,095, respectively.

Build and price details for the Dodge Durango R/T HEMI Orange will be available later this summer on Dodge.com. More information on Dodge, including the brand's Never Lift plan, which provides a 24-month road map to Dodge's performance future, is available at DodgeGarage.com. •





Lawsuit accuses automakers and parts maker in air bag case

By Tom Krisher

DETROIT (AP) _ A class action lawsuit is accusing three automakers and a parts manufacturer of knowingly selling vehicles containing air bag inflators that are at risk of exploding. Two deaths and at least four injuries have been linked to such explosions.

The federal lawsuit, filed in San Francisco, names ARC Automotive Inc. of Knoxville, Tennessee, which made the inflators and sold them to air bag manufacturers. The air bag makers, in turn, sold them to General Motors, Ford and Volkswagen, which are named in the lawsuit, too.

The five plaintiffs are the owners of vehicles with ARC inflators who contend the defective air bag parts were not disclosed when they made their purchases.

The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which has been investigating ARC inflators for nearly seven years without a resolution, estimates that there are 51 million on U.S. roads. That's somewhere between 10% and 20% of all passenger vehicles.

Yet most drivers have no conclusive way to determine whether their vehicle contains an ARC inflator. Even if they were to tear apart the steering wheel assembly, the internal parts might bear the markings only of the automaker or the air bag manufacturer, not the inflator maker.

"You could have a ticking time bomb in your lap and you've got no way of knowing," said Frank Melton, a Florida lawyer who is among those filing the new lawsuit.

"You could have a ticking time bomb in your lap and you've got no way of knowing," said Frank Melton, a Florida lawyer who is among those filing the new lawsuit.

One of the deaths was a mother of 10 who was killed in what appeared to be an otherwise minor crash in Michigan's Upper Peninsula last summer. Police reports show that a metal inflator fragment hit her neck in a crash involving a 2015 Chevrolet Traverse SUV.

In a statement, GM said it hadn't had a chance to review the lawsuit. It said it is dedicated to the safety of its products and customers and is cooperating with NHTSA in its investigation.

Messages were left seeking comment from ARC and Ford. Volkswagen declined comment.

The plaintiffs allege that ARC's inflators use ammonium nitrate as a secondary propellant to inflate the air bags. The propellant is pressed into tablets that can expand and develop microscopic holes if exposed to moisture. Degraded tablets have a larger surface area, causing them to burn too fast and ignite too big of an explosion, according to the lawsuit.

The explosion can blow apart a metal canister housing the chemical, sending metal shards into the cabin. Ammonium nitrate, used in fertilizer and as a cheap explosive, is so dangerous that it can burn too fast even without moisture present, the lawsuit says.

The plaintiffs allege that ARC inflators have blown apart seven times on U.S. roads and two other times in testing by ARC. There have so far been five limited recalls of the inflators that totaled about 5,000 vehicles, including three recalls by GM.

Auto safety advocates say the case seems to mirror the Takata air bag saga that began in the early 2000s, which also involved exploding air bag inflators and resulted in 28 deaths worldwide, hundreds of injuries and the largest automotive recall in U.S. history. So far NHTSA has gathered information but hasn't forced any wider recalls from its investigation that began in July of 2015.

Sean Kane, president of Safety Research & Strategies Inc., which conducts research for lawyers that sue automakers as well as for other groups, noted that just as in the early stages of the Takata ordeal, many ARC ammonium nitrate inflators remain in use.

"It's almost like Groundhog Day here," said Kane, who asserts that NHTSA should have acted already. "It's not a question of whether it can kill or injure people. It already has."

ARC, the lawsuit alleges, knew about the danger of ammonium nitrate in patent applications it filed in 1995 and 1998. In 2019, after several ARC inflators blew apart, ARC acknowledged that its use was not acceptable for automotive air bags, according to the lawsuit.

The suit asserts that General Motors, which began recalling Takata ammonium nitrate inflators in 2013, should have known that ARC's inflators were also unstable.

"GM recalled only a small number of vehicles that contained a particular lot of inflators, despite its knowledge that ARC driver- and passenger-side inflators in various models and model years from 2002 through at least 2015 also had experienced ruptures," the lawsuit said.

In its statement, GM said it makes recall decisions based on data and facts. It declined to comment further.

The lawsuit alleges that ARC's inflators are marred by a systemic problem rather than just a limited manufacturing defect. In 2014, an ARC inflator in a 2004 Kia Optima blew apart in a crash in New Mexico, injuring the driver.

Two years later, the driver of a car made by Kia's sister automaker Hyundai was killed in Canada when an ARC infla-

Continued on page 20

Hyundai announces $5.5B electric vehicle plant in Georgia

By Russ Bynum

ELLABELL, Ga. — Hyundai Motor Group confirmed recently the company will spend $5.5 billion on a huge electric vehicle plant near Savannah that will employ thousands — a deal Georgia's governor called the largest economic development project in the state's history.

Hyundai Motor Group CEO Jaehoon Chang made the announcement with Gov. Brian Kemp at the site of the future factory in Bryan County, where state and local officials purchased a flat, sprawling tract for $61 million last year in hopes of luring a major manufacturer.

"Hard-working Georgians are going to have the opportunity to have a really high-paying, advanced manufacturing job with a great company," Kemp said in an interview.

Hyundai said it will employ at least 8,100 workers at the plant near the unincorporated town of Ellabell. It will be Hyundai's first U.S. plant dedicated to assembling electric vehicles and will also produce vehicle batteries.

"This new, high tech EV plant represents the future of our business," Chang told more than 100 people sipping champagne under a tent pitched at the site on a dusty field of cleared dirt.

Hyundai Motors said it plans to start construction early next year and in 2025 begin producing up to 300,000 vehicles per year. The company didn't say which vehicle models the Georgia plant will make. In a video shown at the Georgia announcement, Hyundai Motors Chairman Euisun Chung said it will produce "a wide range of exciting, innovative EVs for our American customers."

The company and state officials said they expect suppliers to invest an additional $1 billion in the area.

"It's going to continue to bring wealth and opportunity to the region," said Kemp, who predicted a ripple effect that will boost businesses from Savannah's already booming seaport to restaurants and convenience stores.

The announcement came as President Joe Biden was visiting South Korea. He was scheduled to meet with Hyundai's CEO in Seoul on later. Jake Sullivan, the president's national security adviser, told reporters Biden "will have the opportunity to say thank you for this significant investment that will occur in the United States."

The timing was fortunate for Kemp, who defeated former U.S. Sen. David Perdue in a Republican primary election that was decided last month.

It's the second huge electric vehicle plant announced in Georgia in less than a year. Rivian Automotive announced in December plans for a $5 billion electric truck plant east of Atlanta that's expected to employ about 7,500 workers.

Kemp declined to discuss details of what incentives and tax breaks the company was offered for locating in Georgia. Rivian received a package worth $1.5 billion.

The state of Georgia and partner local governments bought 2,200 acres (890 acres) in Bryan County a year ago to lure a large manufacturer. It wasn't large enough for Hyundai. The state and its partners purchased two additional neighboring tracts to expand the site to more than 2,900 acres (1,170 hectares).

That's more than 4.5 square miles (11.6 square kilometers) dedicated to the Hyundai project. Officials declined to give the sale price of the extra acreage, saying the property was under contract but the deal hadn't been finalized.

The plant site sits adjacent to Interstate 16 that links Savannah and Macon, not far from its intersection with Interstate 95 that spans the Eastern Seaboard. It's also near the Port of Savannah, the fourth-busiest U.S. seaport.

Hyundai said it will employ at least 8,100 workers at the plant near the unincorporated town of Ellabell.

Kemp predicted the Hyundai plant will become one of the biggest customers for Savannah's port, which has already seen explosive growth in recent years.

Hyundai Motor Group sells cars under the Hyundai and Kia brands. The South Korean automaker already operates two American assembly plants in Montgomery, Alabama, and in West Point, Georgia.

Perdue stopped in Savannah to campaign with Sarah Palin, the former Alaska governor and onetime GOP vice presidential candidate. Palin borrowed one of former President Donald Trump's slogans to praise Perdue as a Republican who "was America First before America First was cool."

Perdue has accused Kemp of trying to buy his reelection with the Rivian deal and its big incentives. Kemp brushed off the criticism, noting Perdue's record of outsourcing U.S. jobs to overseas manufactures as a corporate executive.

The governor said incentives help Georgia compete for big projects with states such as South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. He pointed to the Kia plant in West Point as one that filled a void when the local textile industry shut down years earlier.

"You've seen downtowns that used to be ghost towns, they're vibrant communities now," Kemp said. He added: "These are investments that we'll be reaping the benefits of 20 to 30 years down the road." *(AP)* ▪

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Shop Profile



By Tom Williams

What do old racers do when they no longer race? Some simply go to the house and dust their trophies while others find new endeavors like broadcasting. Then there are those who learn to play golf or go fishing.

Mark Fulks Sr., who readily admits that he is not very good at fishing or golf, quit racing at the ripe old age of 18 and went back to work in his father's garage. Ken Fulks was a drag racer and a well-known garage owner in and around Nashville, Tenn. Fulks started working for his father at 13 and worked there beyond high school. While working at Ken's Auto Service, Fulks learned the "mechanics" of being a mechanic and the importance of customer service.

Under his dad's tutelage, Mark learned all the basics of the business, including how to drive the company wrecker. He recalls being sent out to retrieve customers' cars at age 14 while one of the shop's mechanics rode shotgun. When he asked his dad why he had to have a mechanic with him, Ken Fulks replied that he had to have a licensed driver in the wrecker.

Mark Fulks Sr. spent the next three or four decades building his reputation and a very loyal following. He left his dad's shop in 1983 to work for a local tune-up shop where he worked his way up to manager. But he knew he needed more practical knowledge and spent the next 20 plus years working for a couple of local Goodyear dealers — McDuffie Tire and Bell Road Tire.

He started out as a technician and worked his way into management. In 1990, he opened a new retail service center and store in Old Hickory, Tenn., for McDuffie Tire. During his years at Goodyear, Fulks learned the ins-and-outs of running a fast-paced, consumer-oriented shop while managing a crew of several mechanics and technicians.

Through all of those years working for others, Fulks did "side work" in his fully-equipped garage at home. He hinted that while working for others was a great experience, he wasn't going to get wealthy. The side work made it possible for him to support his family and children and keep his lifestyle.

In 2005, Mark Fulks Sr. decided the time was right to become an independent businessman. He opened Mark's Automotive Repair Center in Mt. Juliet, Tenn., with a small crew (two, including himself) and moved into a shop on busy Lebanon Road. Several years ago, that shop was partially destroyed by a tornado. They lost an outer wall and several customer cars were damaged. Fortunately, he had good insurance and the landlord erected a temporary wall. He only lost a couple of days business.

On Feb. 18, 2016, Fulks bought the current shop, which at one point was the successful Webster Brothers Automotive. The Webster Brothers sold their business to another shop owner who let the business deteriorate and abandoned to building. It took Fulks three months to get it in shape to open.


Owner Mark Fulks Sr.



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Today, the 6,000-square-foot building houses 5,500 square feet of well-equipped shop space with five lifts, diagnostic machines, manufacturer-required tools, and everything needed for a full-service repair center. In the front, Mark Sr. and Mark Jr. have their offices, plus a nicely-appointed customer waiting area.

When they remodeled the building, Fulks added two double-width garage doors, giving them four doors for easy entry and great natural lighting. They also have a state-of-the-art waste-oil heater. Attached to the rear of the building is a 500-square-foot parts building and a covered outdoor lift.

This is a full-service mechanical shop. Besides the basics — oil changes and tune-ups — Mark's Automotive offers full engine diagnostic and repair or replace, transmission R&R, timing belts, emissions, alignments, exhaust, AC repair, computer diagnostics, and much more. They offer nationwide warranties on most of their work. They are a highly-rated NAPA Auto-Care Center, AAA Approved Auto Repair, B+ rated with the Better Business Bureau, and feature Jasper Engines & Transmissions. They are also starting to "tool-up" in anticipation for the electric vehicle (EV) market.

So, what will Mark's Automotive not do? They don't do collision work. They don't do restorations. Fulks actually has a business partner in another shop in Middle Tennessee that specializes in restorations. Another place they draw the line is European cars. They prefer to send those to specialty shops. They do, however, specialize on all things domestic and Asian.

As mentioned earlier, Mark Fulks Sr. spent a lifetime honing relationships and earning his customers' trust. He has done that through honesty, quality work, and surrounding himself with a talented team. There was a time when Ken Fulks, Mark Sr.'s father, worked with him. Mark Jr. graduated from Middle Tennessee State University with a bachelor's degree in business management and a minor in business administration. He spent 10 years with Walgreen's, but came on board full time a few years ago. When he did, that made Mark's Automotive a locally-owned, third-generation business. He doesn't turn wrenches but is the business manager and shop foreman. And he took them into the techno-based 21st century.

Mark Sr. has another son who is going to a diesel trade school but works part time one day a week. They have five technicians with ASE certifications, manufacturer certifications, Master Tech status, dealership experience, retail experience, and some management experience. Scott Braswell has been with Mark Sr. from Day One while the others have been with him for five to ten years.

Fulks doesn't pay employees by the hour, but rather, they are paid a generous salary with over-time bonuses. Each of his guys has the opportunity to earn a respectable three-figure income. With over $2 million in sales last year, he is on track to exceed that this year. He could not achieve these numbers without a talented, loyal and hard working crew.

Mark Fulks Sr. built his business on loyal customers and referrals. The advertising he does is in support of local schools and community. He supports the local trade schools with leadership, advice, and sometimes equipment.

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... Mark's Automotive Repair

Continued from page 13

He is also a strong supporter of St. Jude, the Quarter Mile Foundation, and the Wounded Warrior Project.

So, what is the outlook for Mark's Automotive Repair Center? There are some concerns. Age is a big factor in the future. He sees very few young people getting into the business, and said the schools need to do a better job of giving opportunities for students to consider the trades as an avocation.

Along those lines, he said technology creates problems for old-school mechanics. As cars and trucks become more technically dependent, the harder it is to complete common repairs like changing headlights or batteries.

"Back in the day, it was 80 percent hands-on and 20 percent in the head. Now, it is 20 percent hands-on and 80 percent in the head," Fulks said.

He also mentioned parts costs are up 40 percent, and the hourly labor rate is topping the $100 mark.

But he is optimistic about the future, and even with the push for EVs, he believes people won't give up their gas-burners easily. He would like to see his son, Mark Jr., take the reigns at some point — not yet — but at some point. Fulks Sr. is at a time in his life where he can take some time for his wife and grandkids, or go to a race, or even take some of his treasured cars to a show. He likes the feeling that he can walk away from the shop to have some fun and not worry that it is going to implode.

For now, it is business as usual. ▪



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Nissan mulling third auto plant in the US to meet EV demand

By Yuri Kageyama

YOKOHAMA, Japan — Nissan is considering adding a new auto plant in the U.S. to keep up with growing the demand for electric vehicles, a top executive at the Japanese automaker said recently.

"It may not be a surprise that we go for a third plant," Chief Operating Officer Ashwani Gupta told reporters at Yokohama headquarters.

Nissan Motor Co. now has two auto plants in the U.S. One in Canton, Mississippi makes the Titan pickup truck and Altima sedan, among other models. The other in Smyrna, Tennessee makes the Leaf electric car, Pathfinder sport utility vehicle and other models.

Each of the plants employs thousands of workers and has produced millions of Nissan vehicles.

The third plant would not just be an added assembly line to an existing plant but a totally new facility, although it may be built as an extension of an existing plant, Gupta said. That would add several thousand jobs in the area, although its realization would be some years down the road.

"The importance of localization will increase year on year," Gupta said.

Depending on the region, customers may receive incentives for buying electric vehicles, and the fluctuating foreign exchange rate may also make localized production more desirable, according to Gupta.

His comments come a day after Nissan reported profitability for the first time in three fiscal years, despite challenges in the overall auto industry stemming from a shortage of chips because of restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nissan, allied with Renault SA of France, recorded a profit of 215.5 billion yen ($1.7 billion) for the fiscal year through March, a reversal from the 448.7 billion yen loss the previous fiscal year.

Gupta's comments also reflect a growing shift toward ecological vehicles to support sustainable forms of energy and transportation amid worries about climate change.

The third plant would not just be an added assembly line to an existing plant but a totally new facility, although it may be built as an extension of an existing plant, Gupta said.

Gupta said Nissan, as an alliance partner, would support Renault in its recently floated idea to possibly spin off its electric vehicle division. But he made clear Nissan would not take similar action.

"It's too early to say we go in one direction," he said.

Nissan's products were more diversified because it had the key markets of China and North America in addition to Japan and Europe, he said.

Gupta declined to comment on what might be desirable for the future leadership at Nissan, stressing that special company committees were charged with that task.

Nissan has focused on strengthening its corporate governance after Carlos Ghosn, who led Nissan for two decades, was arrested on criminal charges in 2018. Ghosn says he is innocent. He jumped bail and fled to Lebanon, the nation of his ancestry.

Takaki Nakanishi, an auto analyst with Jefferies, said Nissan's financial results were within expectations, but he thought its target of selling 4 million vehicles this fiscal year was conservative.

"There is opportunity for upside in volume, in our view," he said in a report. *(AP)* ▪

Auto supplier to build new facility, creating 218 jobs

LAWRENCEBURG, Ky. — An automotive supplier will build a new manufacturing facility in central Kentucky, creating 218 full-time jobs, officials said.

Summit Polymers Inc. will construct a $37.5 million 140,000-square-foot (13,006-square-meter) facility in Lawrenceburg, a statement from Gov. Andy Beshear's office said. The company designs and manufactures automotive interior components. Workers at the new plant will conduct plastic injection molding, paint applications and assembly operations, the statement said.

Work on the project will begin soon and is expected to be completed by next June. The Portage, Michigan-based company has two other plants in Kentucky, one in Mount Sterling and another in Elizabethtown.

"SPI has had a strong presence in the commonwealth for more than three decades, and this new Lawrenceburg operation will position the company for even bigger things in the future," Beshear said. *(AP)* ▪



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United Rental orders more than 500 EVs from Ford

NEW YORK — The world's largest equipment rental company will buy 500 Ford F-150 Lightning electric trucks and 30 of the automaker's E-Transit electric vans.

United Rental expects 120 of the trucks and all 30 of the vans to be delivered and deployed this year as part of its goal to reduce its fleet's greenhouse gas emissions 35% by 2030, the company said recently. The vehicles will be used by customers on construction and industrial sites and by its own sales, service and delivery personnel, the Connecticut company said.

Like other old-guard automakers, Ford has invested billions of dollars to rapidly develop and produce its electric vehicle lineup. Ford announced in March that it was splitting its electric vehicle and internal combustion operations into two independent wings to accelerate its adaptation of new technology.

Earlier this year, the Detroit automaker said it would nearly double the annual production of the F-150 Lightning to 150,000 per year based on a high number of reservations.

Ford's heavy investment in electric vehicles — its own and others — has come at a cost. The company reported last month ago that it lost $3.1 billion in the first quarter, weighed down by its investment in the electric-vehicle startup Rivian. Sales were also dinged as a shortage of chips limited the supply of pickups and SUVs in North America. *(AP)* ▪

French fiberglass maker hiring 400 in $28M Georgia plant expansion

DUBLIN, Ga. — A French manufacturer says it will restart the fiberglass furnace at a Georgia plant it purchased in 2019, investing $28 million and hiring 400 new workers.

Saint-Gobain said that its ADFORS unit would expand the plant it bought for $17.5 million in the middle Georgia town of Dublin. The plant currently has 47 full-time and 23 temporary employees, Saint-Gobain spokesperson Peter Clark said.

A Latvian company, Valmiera Glass, spent $110 million on the plant in two phases that were finished in 2018, but went bankrupt in 2019 and laid off 350 workers. Saint-Gobain bought the plant during Valmiera's bankruptcy proceeding.

The plant makes mats made from fiberglass that are used for high-temperature insulation and heat protection in products like automotive exhaust systems, fire blankets, fire doors and insulating battery packs in electric vehicles.

Clark said the furnace will make 50,000 tons of glass fiber a year, allowing Saint-Gobain to double North American production of glass fiber.

Workers will make an average of $45,000 a year, plus benefits, Clark said.

Ryan Waldrep, president of the Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority, said the state would pay an estimated $1 million to train workers.

Saint-Gobain could claim various tax breaks, including an income tax credit allowing it to annually deduct $4,000 per job from state income taxes, up to $8 million over five years, as long as workers make at least $30,628 a year. If Saint-Gobain does not earn enough to owe that much in taxes, the state would give it personal income taxes from worker paychecks to make up the rest.

Waldrep said local governments will not abate property taxes and said the state does not anticipate spending any cash to improve infrastructure. *(AP)* ▪

Event Press Release

SOUTHEAST COLLISION CONFERENCE

Contact: Josh Kent
Phone: 704-998-8553
Email: info@southeastcollisionconference.com
Website: Southeast Collision Conference (carolinascollisionassociation.com)

The Carolinas, Tennessee, and the Gulf States Collision Associations present the Southeast Collision Conference

Richburg, South Carolina-The Southeast Collision Conference will be taking place at the Gateway Conference Center on June 23, 24, and 25. Kicking off the event with Collision Hub on June 23. Don't miss out on the skill challenges (painting, welding, estimating), open to all, with a top prize of $1000 cash for each category, the John Eagle Honda Fit vehicle on site (Intrepid Direct Sponsored), FREE Tradeshow Floor with over 30 vendors with live product demos, and break out education classes. If the owner/manager signs up at full price, all other employees are $20 for both days (Excluding Collision Hub) if they want to take classes (Contact Josh Kent for special pricing). Special thanks goes out to Lombard Equipment, Calibrators of the Carolinas, and ShopFix for being our Platinum Sponsors.

Southeast Collision Conference is open to all collision professionals in any State. Membership not required to register for conference. Book and reserve hotel as space is limited. For conference tickets, prices, and information visit: Southeast Collision Conference (carolinascollisionassociation.com) or contact Josh Kent 704-998-8553

Mercedes claims record price for rare winged car at auction

BERLIN — German automaker Mercedes-Benz said that it has auctioned an extremely rare car from its company collection for a roaring 135 million euros ($143 million).

The company said the price paid by a private collector earlier last month for the 300 SLR Uhlenhaut Coupe, with its distinctive gullwing doors, makes it the most valuable car of all time. The claim couldn't be independently verified.

Mercedes Benz said the proceeds would be used to launch a fund providing scholarships for young people to learn about and research environmental science and decarbonization. The greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, released by burning fossil fuels, is largely blamed for climate change.

The car was one of just two prototypes built in 1955, and named after the company's then-chief engineer Rudolf Uhlenhaut.

"We would like to encourage a new generation to follow in Rudolf Uhlenhaut's innovative footsteps and develop amazing new technologies, particularly those that support the critical goal of decarbonization and resource preservation," the CEO of Mercedes-Benz Group, Ola Kallenius, said.

The company said its collection comprises some 1,100 cars dating back to 1886. (*AP*)

French carmaker to sell Russian operations to Moscow

By AP Wire Service

Russia will take control of French car manufacturer Renault's operations in the country and resurrect a Soviet-era auto brand, officials said in May, marking the first major nationalization of a foreign business since the war in Ukraine began.

Renault said it would sell its majority stake in Avtovaz, a Russian car company best known for its Lada brand, to a state-run research institute known as NAMI.

Renault's other Russia operations, primarily a factory in Moscow, will be sold to the Moscow city government. The mayor of the Russian capital, Sergei Sobyanin, said the city would bring back the Moskvich brand for cars made at the factory. Moskvich was a major auto brand in the Soviet Union but went into steep decline in the 1990s and vanished from the market in the early 2000s.

"Today, we have taken a difficult but necessary decision," Renault CEO Luca de Meo said in a statement, "and we are making a responsible choice towards our 45,000 employees in Russia, ...

"Today, we have taken a difficult but necessary decision," Renault CEO Luca de Meo said in a statement, "and we are making a responsible choice towards our 45,000 employees in Russia, while preserving the Group's performance and our ability to return to the country in the future, in a different context."

Renault didn't give any financial details of its sales but said the deal included an option to buy back the Avtovaz stake in the next six years. Trade and Industry Minister Denis Manturov indicated in April to Russian media that the Avtovaz deal could be conducted for a symbolic one ruble.

Ministry official Denis Pak told state TV that the deal allows Avtovaz to keep making Renault's Duster passenger car design, now badged as a Lada, and that the new Moskvich operation was likely to produce cars this year.

Selling gets Renault out of a bind that Western companies are facing as they determine whether to pull out of Russia and weather the hit to their income. But continuing to work in Russia after the invasion could risk damaging corporations' reputations with customers. With an eye on avoiding unemployment, the Russian government has been urging reluctant foreign investors to either resume operations or sell to someone who will.

Renault's announcement came the same day McDonald's said it is moving to sell its Russian business, which includes 850 restaurants that employ 62,000 people. The fast food giant did not name a prospective Russian buyer but said it would seek one that will hire its workers and pay them until the sale closes.

The new Russian owners taking over Renault's operations will have to grapple with a shortage of imported components for cars, especially electronics. The Russian auto-making sector is heavily dependent on international supply chains that have been disrupted by sanctions over the war, while getting deliveries from abroad has become more difficult and expensive.

The NAMI research institute has some experience developing luxury cars used by Russian leaders, including President Vladimir Putin, but on a much smaller scale than the sprawling Soviet-era Avtovaz plant, where Russian and foreign investors have for decades struggled to make mass-market cars profitably.

Nearly half a million vehicles were sold in Russia last year under Renault and Avtovaz brands.

Sobyanin, the Moscow mayor, outlined ambitious plans for the resurrected Moskvich brand on his blog, saying it would start with traditional engines but produce "in the future, electric cars," in a partnership with Russian truck manufacturer Kamaz.

Sobyanin said the city was motivated by keeping jobs but stopped short of ruling out staff cuts, saying only that "we will try to keep the majority of the personnel working directly at the plant and for its subcontractors." (*AP*) ■





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Argo touts driverless operations in Miami and Austin

NEW YORK — An autonomous vehicle technology company that partners with Ford and Volkswagen says it has started driverless operations in two of eight cities where it is developing its technology.

Pittsburgh-based Argo AI has pulled drivers from its autonomous cars in Miami and Austin, Texas, though it is still in the testing phase. Its commercial partnerships with Walmart and Lyft still have backup drivers in both cities.

The company is partnering with Lyft to use its autonomous test vehicles for their ride-sharing network in Miami Beach and grocery delivery for Walmart in Miami and Austin.

Argo says it is the first company to go driverless in two American cities, but Argo isn't the first company to go driverless. Waymo, the autonomous vehicle unit of Alphabet, Google's parent company, announced in March that it started carrying employees in electric Jaguar I-Pace SUVs in San Francisco without human backup drivers.

In February, General Motors and its autonomous vehicle subsidiary Cruise posted a signup page for anyone to reserve a free ride, also in San Francisco.

Late last year, a semitruck operated by the San Diego company TuSimple completed an 80-mile route in Arizona, the first successful fully-autonomous run by a class 8 vehicle on open public roads with no human intervention. *(AP)* ▪

Battery materials company opens new factory

MOSES LAKE, Wash. — A battery materials company has purchased a 600,000-square foot facility in Moses Lake, Washington, to be used to manufacture lithium-ion anode battery materials for the automotive and cell phone industries.

Sila, based in Alameda, California, said the facility will bring hundreds of new jobs to the central Washington town. The company said it was drawn by the region's abundant hydropower.

Sila is making an initial investment to deliver silicon-based anode production sufficient to power batteries in 100,000 to 500,000 electric vehicles and 500 million mobile phones annually.

Production lines at the facility will start-up in the second half of 2024, and reach full production in the first half of 2025. The Moses Lake site has the potential for exponential growth that could power two million to 10 million electric vehicles per year, the company said.

"Sila is delivering proven next-generation anode materials today" said Gene Berdichevsky, co-founder, and CEO of Sila, said in a statement. *(AP)* ▪

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Biden canceled offshore oil lease sales

WASHINGTON (AP) _ The Biden administration says it is canceling three oil and gas lease sales scheduled in the Gulf of Mexico and off the coast of Alaska, removing millions of acres from possible drilling as U.S. gas prices reach record highs.

The Interior Department announced the decision, citing a lack of industry interest in drilling off the Alaska coast and "conflicting court rulings" that have complicated drilling efforts in the Gulf of Mexico, where the bulk of U.S. offshore drilling takes place,

The decision likely means the Biden administration will not hold a lease sale for offshore drilling this year and comes as Interior appears set to let a mandatory five-year plan for offshore drilling expire in April.

"Unfortunately, this is becoming a pattern - the administration talks about the need for more supply and acts to restrict it," said Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of the American Petroleum Institute, the top lobbying group for the oil and gas industry. "As geopolitical volatility and global energy prices continue to rise, we again urge the administration to end the uncertainty and immediately act on a new five-year program for federal offshore leasing," he said.

The lease cancellations come as gas prices have surged to a record $4.40 a gallon amid the war in Ukraine and other disruptions that have pushed prices $1.40 a gallon higher than a year ago. Consumer prices jumped 8.3% last month from a year ago, the government said recently.

A federal appeals court in New Orleans, meanwhile, is considering a challenge to a moratorium on new federal leasing that Biden imposed soon after taking office in January 2021. Biden said the administration needed to consider the effect of new drilling on climate change and conduct proper environmental reviews.

Louisiana and 12 other states challenged Biden's order, saying laws passed in response to the 1970s oil crisis require lease sales on federal lands and waters. *(AP)* ▪

GM to offer electrified Corvette as early as 2023

General Motors says it will offer an electrified Chevrolet Corvette as early as next year.

President Mark Reuss said in a statement on LinkedIn that the automaker will also sell a fully electric Corvette sometime in the future.

An electrified vehicle generally means a gas-electric hybrid or a plug-in rechargeable hybrid, but more details on the vehicles are expected at a later date. Interest in electric vehicles is increasing among consumers as demand for an electric Corvette has been building among the sports car's fan base.

Last August President Joe Biden even discussed how he'd had a conversation with General Motors CEO Mary Barra about wanting to test drive an electric Corvette once it is built.

Earlier last month GM and Honda announced that they are planning to co-develop some affordable electric vehicles that will use GM's next-generation Ultium battery technology.

The vehicles, will include a compact Chevrolet Equinox SUV that will sell for around $30,000. It's expected to go sale in North America next year.

In January GM said that it plans to spend nearly $7 billion to convert a factory to make electric pickup trucks and to build a new battery cell plant.

GM has set a goal of building only electric passenger vehicles by 2035. It has pledged to have 30 electric vehicle models for sale globally by 2025. *(AP)* ▪

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... parts supply chain, HR issues

Continued from page 4

everyone involved, including the customer and insurer, is on the same page.

Ben Clymer Jr. of Ben Clymer's The Body Shop in Southern California said he's experienced parts supply chain issues firsthand: He's driving his own vehicle with damage from an accident because five of the needed parts are on back order. He said that like Radman, his company is returning more otherwise repaired vehicles to customers missing cosmetic parts, though he said that requires letting customers know well in advance that's a real possibility, and also "triggers having an additional tracking system for all those vehicles."

"We're also triple-checking what can actually be repaired. Our repair percentages are going up," Clymer said.

Rich O'Leary, manager of Fix Auto Sierra Vista in Arizona, said another challenge of releasing vehicles with a cosmetic part that hasn't arrived is the customer satisfaction survey question related to whether they had to bring their vehicle back to the shop. He said his shop also uses the PartsVoice website to locate needed OEM parts beyond the local market.

"Often you'll find a dealership around the country that has the part sitting on their shelf collecting dust," he said. "It costs more to have them package and send it, but that's an alternative."

New human resource challenges

Also during CIC in Phoenix, California-based employment law attorney Corey King discussed company drug and alcohol policies, and "service animals" in the workplace.

As more states legalize marijuana, King said, use of cannabis and related products grows. It's a good reminder, he said, for businesses to ensure their drug and alcohol policy does not include the phrase "under the influence." If it does, King said, "that policy is completely untenable and, I would argue, completely unenforceable." In a state where the alcohol DUI limit is .08, King said, "Do you really want somebody jumping behind the wheel of that car to test drive it when they would blow a .07? They're not in violation of the law or your policy, because they're not under the influence by the legal standard for alcohol."

"Often you'll find a dealership around the country that has the part sitting on their shelf collecting dust," he said. "It costs more to have them package and send it, but that's an alternative."

King also said more employers are getting employee requests to bring a "service animal" to the work place. In order to qualify as a "service animal" under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, it has to be a dog (or, oddly, a miniature horse) that is individually trained to perform tasks for a person with a disability.

"The ADA does not recognize emotional support, comfort, companionship or guarding as a recognized task," King said. "So your emotional support animal isn't protected under the ADA. This applies even if that person brings you a doctor's note that says [they] need this emotional support animal."

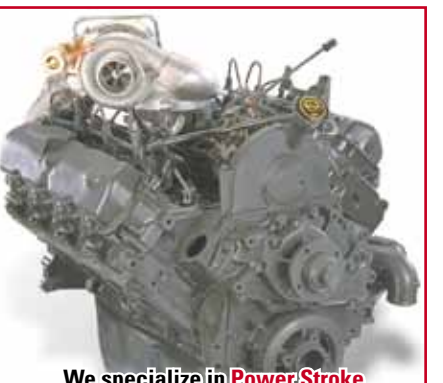
If asked about bringing an animal to work, the ADA requires employers to "engage in an interactive process… and provide reasonable accommodations that will allow disabled employees to perform the essential functions of their job," King said. Ask what kind of animal it is, he said. If the employee's disability is obvious, the inquiry is over and the dog or horse must be allowed. If it's not obvious, ask if the animal is required because of a disability (but do not ask for documentation of the disability). If it is, ask what tasks the animal is trained to perform; do not ask for documentation of training nor for a demonstration the animal's ability.

Common tasks (though not a complete list) include: guiding the visually impaired; pulling a wheelchair; alerting people who are deaf; calming individuals with PTSD during anxiety attacks; alerting and protecting a person having a seizure; or reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed meds.

If all those requirements are met, the animal must be allowed unless it becomes disruptive or a danger.

"Now, if someone tries to make an issue of this with you, don't go this alone," King said. "Get hold of me, or someone you trust, who knows this stuff, to help you navigate through." ▪

John Yoswick, a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore., who has been writing about the automotive industry since 1988, is also the editor of the weekly CRASH Network bulletin (www.CrashNetwork.com). He can be contacted by email at john@CrashNetwork.com.

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... air bag case

Continued from page 10

tor exploded in a crash.

The lawsuit also names Volkswagen and Ford as defendants, alleging that they represented the air bag inflators as safe while knowing they were dangerous.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration began investigating ARC inflators in 2015 after an Ohio woman was injured when an inflator exploded in a Chrysler minivan. At the time the agency estimated that there were 490,000 ARC inflators on the nation's roads.

The review was elevated to an engineering analysis, a step closer to a product recall in 2016 after the death in Canada.

Though a seven-year investigation is longer than most NHTSA reviews, inflators are particularly complex, said David Friedman, a former NHTSA acting administrator who is now a vice president at *Consumer Reports*.

Automakers appear to be balking at recalls for cost reasons, Friedman said. And NHTSA, he suggested, needs a ``slam dunk'' case before seeking recalls because of threats and lawsuits that automakers have filed in the past.

"That's one of the things that's broken in the system," he said.

Friedman described NHTSA as a chronically underfunded agency that has had to prioritize safety issues after four years of the Trump administration, which demanded far less federal regulation.

"The fact that it's stretched on seven years, the companies should have blinked, or NHTSA should have made them, or if they truly don't have a case, then say so," Friedman said.

A NHTSA official who spoke on condition of anonymity in order to speak freely about an ongoing inquiry, said the investigation has persisted because of the complexity of air bag inflators and because ARC's design is different from Takata's.

"We want to make sure what we do is thorough." he said.

He noted that NHTSA's investigation of ARC has had to examine issues different from the Takata case. Ammonium nitrate in Takata's inflators, for example, would deteriorate when airborne moisture entered the canister. But ARC pressurizes its inflator canisters to keep moisture out.

"It's not similar to Takata," the official said.

Whether the ammonium nitrate tablets can deteriorate without moisture is still being investigated, he said.

The agency, he said, has retrieved ARC inflators from vehicles to learn how they work. It also has gathered production and other data from ARC and automakers and issued an order making automakers report any problems with ARC inflators.

He noted that several years went by without any incidents, before there were three in the past two years and that each of those cases is informing the investigation. *(AP)* ■

Ford's F-150 Lighting delivers more horsepower, more payload capacity, more range

By Ford Press Release

DEARBORN, Mich., – F-150® Lightning™ customers will benefit from more power and capability than they expected from their trucks.

F-150 Lightning, the only full-size electric pickup available now with a starting price less than $40,000, will begin to ship to customers in the coming days, starting with the Pro Series, as Ford establishes itself as a leader in the electric vehicle revolution. Lightning is the smartest, most innovative F-150 that Ford has ever built, with the freedom of a 10-kilowatt smart power plant on wheels, software updates that will make it even better over time and Built Ford Tough capability.

Both the standard- and extended-range battery packs offered on F-150 Lightning will deliver more horsepower than originally targeted and announced when the truck was revealed in May 2021, and the payload capacity increased as well.

"We were seriously focused on raising the bar on this truck, including after we revealed it, so we can deliver more for our customers," said Dapo Adewusi, F-150 Lightning vehicle engineering manager. "And our drive for continuous improvement will get a big boost when we start getting feedback and ideas from customers when they receive their Lightnings."

The extended-range battery pack produces 580 horsepower – up from the targeted 563 horsepower. The standard-range battery pack delivers 452 – up from the targeted 426 ponies originally promised. Both packs are capable of producing 775 lbs.-ft. of torque, more than any other F-150 pickup ever.

"Considering the initial numbers were impressive, these are amazing!," says F-150 Lightning customer and high school teacher Travis Piser. "It really inspires a lot of confidence about how the truck will perform."

F-150 Lightning is the only electric vehicle that is Built Ford Tough, and its maximum available payload capacity also increased from original targets. Properly equipped F-150 Lightning pickups can now haul an extra 235 pounds for a total 2,235 pounds of maximum available hauling capability.

"I have been very excited for this truck ever since it debuted a year ago. The experience of driving one was simply amazing," says F-150 Lightning customer and deputy fire marshal Matthew Brown. "Now you are telling me that is has more horsepower and can haul over a ton of weight in the bed. Absolutely blows my mind!"

In March, Ford released the final EPA-estimated range figures for all F-150 Lightning pickup models, which includes a 20-mile increase for F-150 Lightning XLT and Lariat trims with the extended range battery for a total EPA estimated range of 320 miles. Fleet customers have the option to purchase the extended-range battery on Lightning Pro and that has an EPA-estimated range of 320 miles. *(AP)* ■

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Federal agency sends team to probe Tesla crash that killed 3

By Tom Krisher

DETROIT (AP) _ The U.S. government's road safety agency has dispatched a team to investigate the possibility that a Tesla involved in a California crash that killed three people was operating on a partially automated driving system.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration confirmed that it had sent a special crash investigation team to probe the May 12 crash on the Pacific Coast Highway in Newport Beach.

The investigation is part of a larger inquiry by the agency into crashes involving advanced driver assistance systems such as Tesla's Autopilot. Since 2016, the agency has sent teams to 34 crashes in which the systems were either in use or suspected of operating. Of the 34, 28 involved Teslas, according to a NHTSA document released last month.

Fifteen people died in the crashes that NHTSA is investigating, and at least 15 more were hurt. Of the deaths, 14 occurred in crashes involving Teslas, the documents say.

In addition to the specific crashes, NHTSA has investigations under way into Teslas on Autopilot crashing into emergency vehicles parked along roadways, as well as a probe into Autopilot braking for no apparent reason.

Tesla warns drivers using Autopilot, as well as its "Full Self-Driving" system, that the cars can't drive themselves and that drivers must be ready to intervene at all times.

Last June NHTSA ordered automakers to report any crashes on public roads involving fully autonomous vehicles or those with partially automated driver assist systems. The partially automated systems can keep a vehicle centered in its lane and a safe distance from vehicles in front of it. NHTSA says the data can show if there are common patterns in crashes involving the systems.

A message was left recently seeking comment from Tesla, which is headquartered in Austin, Texas. NHTSA wouldn't comment beyond release of the document.

Tesla warns drivers using Autopilot, as well as its "Full Self-Driving" system, that the cars can't drive themselves and that drivers must be ready to intervene at all times.

NHTSA also is investigating two crashes involving Volvos, one Navy shuttle crash, two involving Cadillacs, one in a Lexus and one in a Hyundai. One of the Volvo crashes was an Uber autonomous test vehicle that ran over and killed an Arizona pedestrian in March of 2018.

In the Newport Beach crash, police were called around 12:45 a.m. and found that a 2022 Tesla Model S sedan had crashed into a curb and then hit construction equipment on the south side of the road.

Authorities found two men and a woman dead in the car, and three construction workers suffered minor injuries, according to police. *(AP)* ■

Stellantis pours billions more in to EV center

NEW YORK — Automaker Stellantis said it will invest $3.6 billion Canadian dollars ($2.8 billion) to upgrade two Canadian assembly plants and expand a research center as it accelerates its long-term electrification strategy.

Combined with its March announcement of a joint venture battery plant with LG Energy Solution, the new investment gives Stellantis an overall investment in Ontario of CN$8.6 billion.

"These investments re-affirm our long-term commitment to Canada and represent an important step as we move toward zero-emission vehicles that deliver on our customers' desire for innovative, clean, safe and affordable mobility," said Stellantis North America Chief Operating Officer Mark Stewart.

Amsterdam-based Stellantis was formed last year with the merger of Fiat Chrysler and France's PSA Peugeot and is the world's fourth-largest automaker.

Its long-term global strategy is to invest CN$45 billion through 2025 in electrification and software. The company plans to sell 5 million electric vehicles by 2030, with 50% of its North American passenger-car and light-truck sales going fully electric by 2030. It plans to sell only electric passenger cars in Europe by 2030.

In March, Stellantis announced that a joint venture between it and South Korea's LG Energy Solution to build a large electric vehicle battery factory in Windsor, Ontario, employing about 2,500 people just across a river from Detroit.

That venture plans to spend CN$5 billion to build the new plant on a field in the Canadian city. It's expected to open early in 2024 and will be able to make battery cells and modules for over 500,000 electric vehicles per year. *(AP)* ■

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INDY 500 OPTIMISM FUELS BUICK'S CONSUMER–BASED MOTORSPORTS PROGRAM

FLINT, Mich. – – For decades, automakers have promoted their products through motorsports. At Buick Motor Division, the philosophy of "Race on Sunday, sell on Monday" is taken one step further through t
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1991 Indianapolis 500. Last ye

"For the first time at Indy
engine," said Negri. "We think



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BUICK TAKES ON TOUGH NASCAR COMPETITION

FLINT, Mich.–– Buick Motor Division is playing to win in top–rank NASCAR stock car competition again in 1991.

In NASCAR's top division, Winston Cup, drivers compete in 110–inch wheelbase Regal models powered by 358–cubic inch V–8 engines that generate 600+ horsepower. Three Winston Cup drivers carry the Buick banner in 1991: Brett Bodine, Hut Stricklin, and Rick Wilson.

Bodine, the driver of the Quaker State/King Racing Regal owned by four–time NHRA drag racing champion Kenny Bernstein, won the first race of his Winston Cup career in 1990, the First Union 400 at North Wilkesboro (N.C.) Speedway. Later that year, he captured his first–ever Winston Cup pole position in qualifying for the Mello Yello 500 at the Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway. Stricklin, in his first full season with Bobby Allison Motorsports, will pilot a Buick Regal sponsored by Raybestos Brakes. Wilson, the only new driver to the Tri–Shield camp, will be behind the wheel of Bill and Mickey Stavola's SNICKERS–sponsored Regal this year.

Buick continued to be impressive in the Sears DieHard Racer of the Year standings in 1990, with Brett Bodine finishing third in that season–long competition. The award is given annually to the driver that logs the most racing miles during the 29–event season. Bobby Hillin and Ricky Rudd captured the award in 1988 and 1989, respectively, both driving Buick Regals.

In the Busch Grand National division, a sort of "farm system" for the more prestigious Winston Cup ranks, drivers use Regals with a shorter 105–inch wheelbase and V–6 power under their hoods. Buick's 4.5–liter V–6 racing engine ––which dominated this division in recent years, winning 53 of 60 races in 1989 and '90–– is a derivative of the manufacturer's 3800 V–6 production model. As of mid–April, that same engine had won five of the first seven events in 1991.

No fewer than 10 drivers will fly the Buick colors this season in BGN competition, led by veterans Tommy Houston and Tommy Ellis and newcomer Todd Bodine. Houston, the only driver to compete in every Busch race since the series was formed in 1982, has 23 career wins in the division, second on the all–time list. Ellis is tied for third on that list with 22 career wins. Bodine, younger brother of Winston Cup stars Brett and Geoff, is in his first full season on the Busch tour. In just eight starts a year ago, the 26–year–old Bodine accumulated one Top Five and three Top Ten finishes.

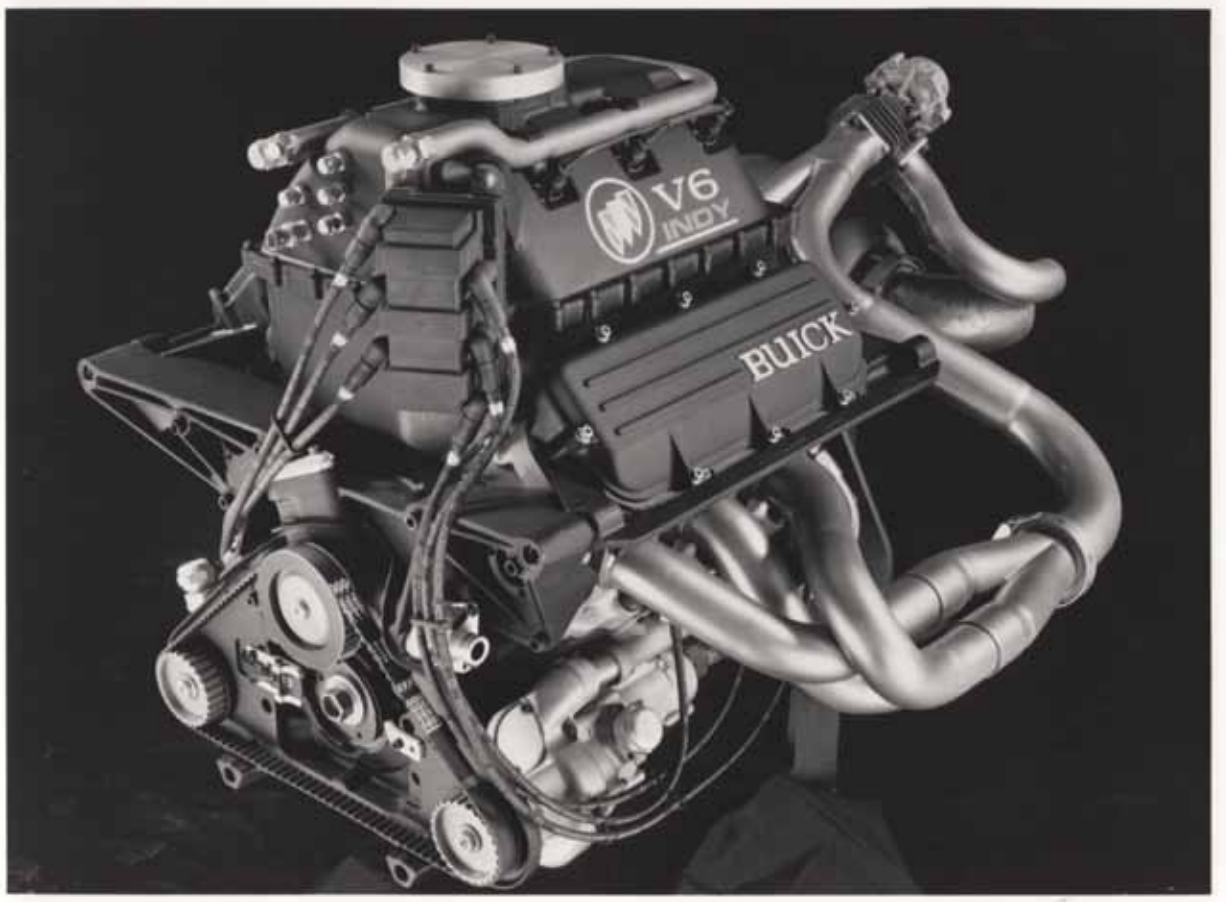
With strong teams and talented drivers in both the Winston Cup and Busch Grand National divisions, Buick looks to visit victory lane often in 1991.

# # #

Buick Motorsports press release from May 1, 1991. Besides the great art work on the cover of the press release folder there was several pages inside covering Buick Motorsports in different series of racing including Indy, NASCAR Grand National, IMSA Light and others. Their total wins in 16 different racing series for the 1990 year was 83, just short of the year before's 86 win year. ■

Continued on page 24

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BUICK V-6 INDY ENGINE

Continued from page 23



BUICK FASTEST IN PRE-INDY TESTING— Jim Crawford's Quaker State Buick, above, recorded the fastest lap in unofficial April testing at Indianapolis -- an impressive 224.2 mph. Buick should have its best shot yet at the May 26 Indy 500 thanks to a new 1991 Lola chassis specially developed for the 800-horsepower Buick Indy V-6 engine. Eleven drivers have announced intentions to qualify with Buick power, five of them in 1991 Lolas similar to the Quaker State car. A Buick Indy engine was fastest qualifier in 1985, while another led the race in 1988, eventually finishing sixth. Buick engines hold all stock-block speed records at the famed Indianapolis oval, and they powered one third of the 33-car field in 1990. In other forms of competition , Buick V-6 racing engines -- derived from the 3800 V-6 available in Buick passenger cars -- have won 253 races and 23 national championships in the last three years. The track reopens May 4 for official practice.

Chevrolet's first pursuit-rated Silverado



DETROIT – Built on 25 years of success with the Tahoe Police Pursuit Vehicle, Chevrolet debuted its first pursuit-rated Silverado. The 2023 Silverado Police Pursuit Vehicle is a crew-cab, short-bed, four-wheel drive truck designed for high speeds and dynamic capability with the added comfort and ample storage capacity needed for an everyday patrol vehicle. ▪

Ford pays $19M to settle claims on fuel economy, payload

By Domn Thompson

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) _ Ford Motor Company recently settled claims by 40 U.S. state attorneys general that the company made misleading claims about the fuel economy and payload capacity of some of its vehicles, violating state consumer protection laws.

The company agreed to pay $19.2 million to the states and refrain from making misleading advertising claims as part of the settlement filed in San Diego Superior Court in California.

The attorneys general said Ford misled consumers about its 2013-2014 C-Max hybrid cars and 2011-2014 Super Duty pick-up trucks.

The company misrepresented how far the C-Max hybrids could travel on a tank of gas and that the vehicles had better real-world fuel economy than other hybrids, the attorney general said.

They said Ford also deliberately left out of its payload calculations for Super Duty pickup trucks standard cargo truck items including the spare wheel, tire, jack and car radio, thus artificially raising the claimed payload capacity.

Ford said in a statement that it was pleased the investigation was settled with no judicial finding of improper conduct and that the company denied violating any federal or state laws.

"We worked with the states to resolve their concerns and in the process limited additional investigative costs and legal expenses for all parties," the company said.

The company misrepresented how far the C-Max hybrids could travel on a tank of gas and that the vehicles had better real-world fuel economy than other hybrids, the attorney general said.

Ford said it voluntarily flagged the incorrect fuel economy rating for federal regulators, corrected it and reimbursed people who bought or leased the vehicles during and shortly after the time that the rating was incorrectly advertised.

Buyers "should be able to trust that they're getting what they paid for," California Attorney General Rob Bonta said in announcing the settlement.

The $1.2 million for California from the settlement will aid state and local enforcement of consumer protection laws.

The settlement includes Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin. *(AP)* ▪

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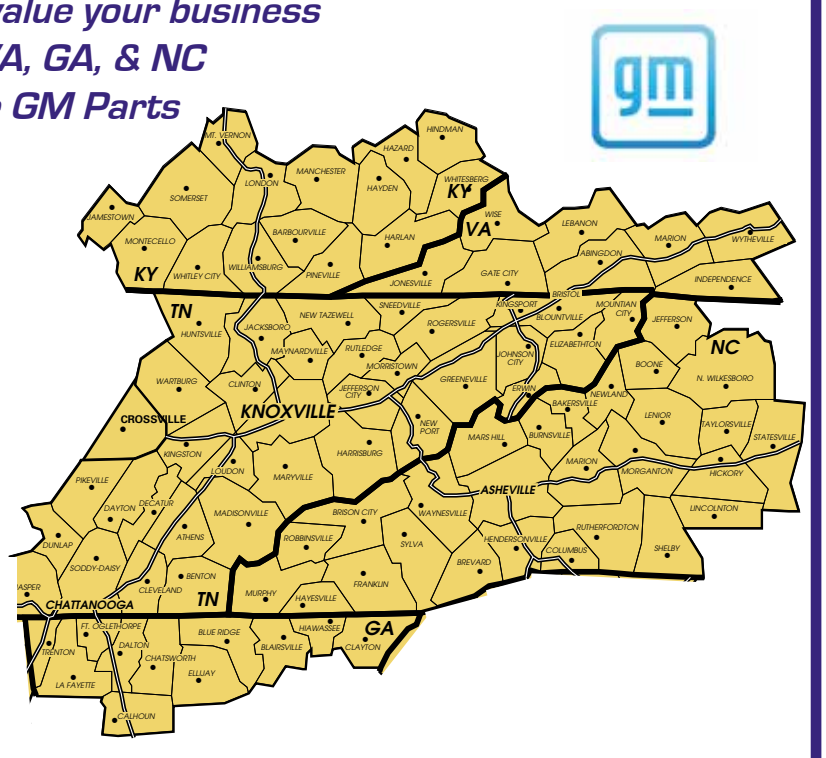
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... Tech Tips

Continued from page 1

of the brake pressure modulator valve (BPMV), (ABS Hydraulic Unit).

Confirmed Repair: The BPMV was replaced, and the brake system was bled as per the procedures. After the repairs, the hill start assist feature operated normally.

RAM 2500 A/C inoperable

Problem: A 2006 Dodge RAM 2500 (2WD, L6-5.9L DSL Turbo, VIN C, automatic transmission) with 168,009 miles was brought to the shop because the A/C was blowing warm air. The customer said it was working fine the day before.

Details: The tech noted that the A/C compressor clutch was not engaging. The static A/C system pressures were within specifications, and he found no diagnostic trouble codes. A Tech-Assist consultant recommended that the technician use a scan tool to monitor the data PIDs that could stop compressor operation, such as: engine coolant temperature, intake air temperature, A/C refrigerant pressure, ambient air temperature, and evaporator temperature.

The tech followed the consultant's advice and found that the evaporator temperature sensor PID was reading only 1 degree Fahrenheit.

Next, he checked the evaporator temperature sensor electrical circuit. He found that pin 7 on Connector C1 at the control head was slightly pushed out.

Confirmed Repair: Once he repaired and refitted the pin, the evaporator temperature sensor PID readings were back in the correct range. Normal compressor operation was restored, and A/C began cooling as designed.

Camaro won't release ignition key

Problem: The owner of a 2011 Chevrolet Camaro (V8-6.2L, automatic transmission/transaxle) with 142,002 miles said that the engine started and ran fine, but when she tried to shut the engine off, the key was stuck in the ignition switch and could not be removed.

Details: First, the technician verified that the engine started and ran okay, and that the ignition key would not release from the lock cylinder. Next, he connected a scan tool and found only one diagnostic trouble code (DTC): U0121 Lost Communication with Electronic Brake Control Module (EBCM).

An ALLDATA Tech-Assist consultant recommended that he verify the underhood and instrument panel fuse block fuses had battery (B+) voltage and were not open or missing. He also advised verifying EBCM power, ground and communication circuit integrity.

The tech found the 20A EBCM #1 Fuse in the instrument panel fuse block was open.

Confirmed Repair: The technician checked the contacts and installed a new fuse. After that, EBCM communication was restored, and the ignition key could be removed. The DTC was cleared and did not return after a thorough test drive.

Dodge RAM won't crank despite fully-charged battery

Problem: The owner had his 2019 Dodge RAM 1500 (4WD, V8-5.7L, automatic transmission/transaxle) with 82,663 miles towed to the shop because the engine would not crank despite having a fully charged battery.

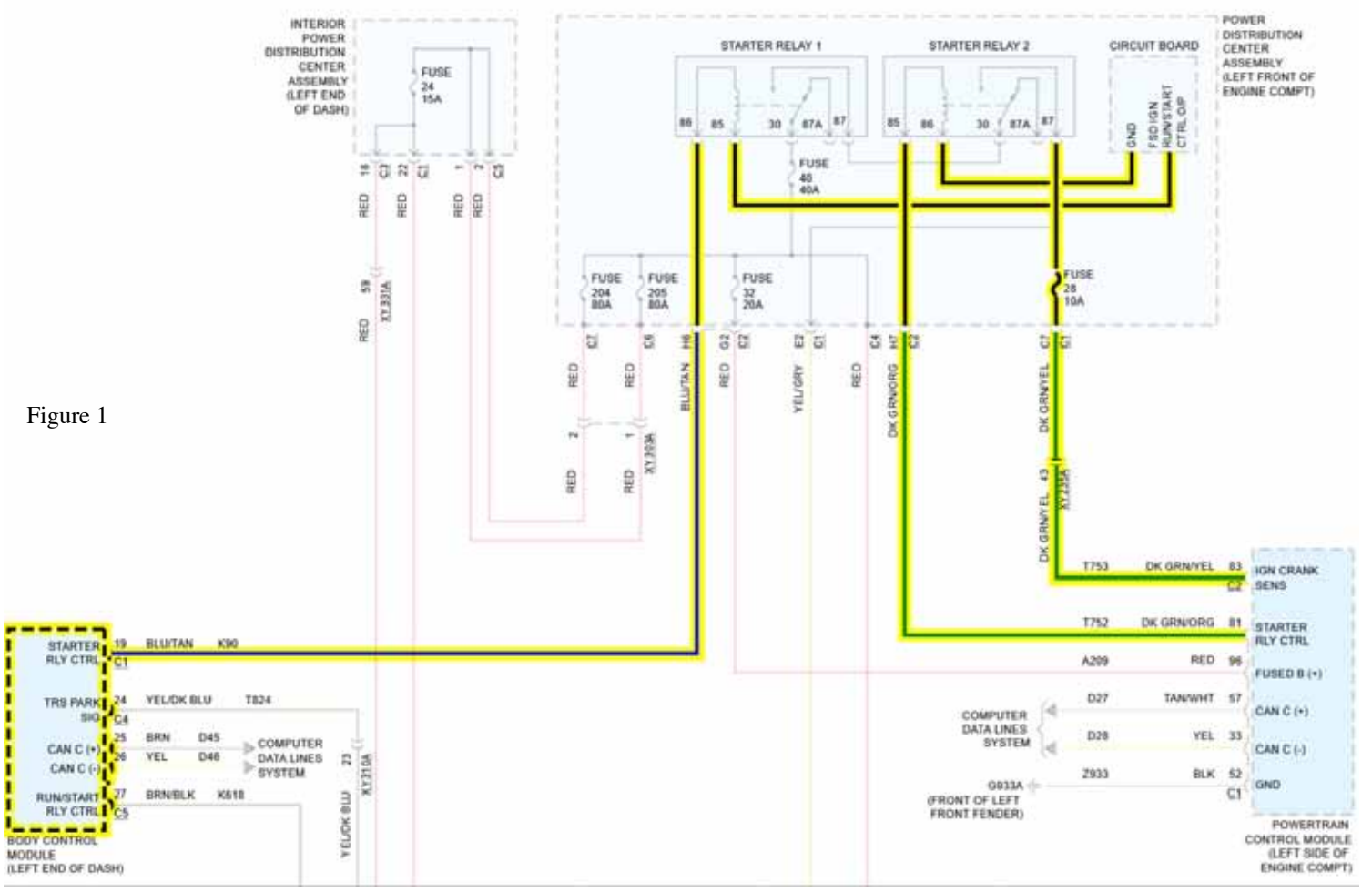
Details: The technician connected a scan tool and found no diagnostic trouble codes. The parameter identification data (PID) indicated that the powertrain control module (PCM) was not receiving a "crank" request. NOTE: The starting system on this vehicle utilizes two starter relays to engage the starter motor. One is controlled by the PCM and the other by the body control module (BCM). The crank request is seen when a PCM PID comes from starter relay 2 after starter relay 1 closes and sends voltage to relay 2.

A Tech-Assist consultant advised using the diagram he sent to the technician (see Figure 1) to confirm both relays were operating. If that didn't find the problem, he also advised verifying which signal was missing, then diagnosing why that signal was missing.

The technician found that the BCM was not sending the start signal to the starter relay 1. He checked the voltage and ground supplied to the BCM and found several pins in connector C1 had poor terminal tension.

Confirmed Repair: The technician cleaned and tightened the terminal pins and made sure the connector snapped together correctly. After the repairs, the engine cranked and started right up. ▪

Figure 1







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Racing Notes

Sweden's Ericsson gives Ganassi another Indy 500 victory

By Jenna Fryer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Marcus Ericsson, once a Formula One backmarker, is now an IndyCar frontrunner.

And an Indianapolis 500 champion.

Ericsson became the second Swede to win the Indy 500 on Sunday, May 29 when he held off some of the biggest names in North American auto racing in front of the largest crowd of his life.

"It's the biggest race in the world," said Ericsson, who called it his biggest victory "by a million miles."

The 31-year-old showed up in IndyCar something of a mystery in 2019 following five unremarkable seasons in Formula One. He'd worked his entire life to make it to the top level of motorsports then washed out winless — not even a single podium finish — over 97 starts.

He didn't exactly dazzle in his first season in North America, either. Ericsson was cut loose from his first IndyCar team after just one year, then bought a seat at Chip Ganassi Racing — he made sure to note it when he said "winning the Indy 500, it's not bad for a pay driver" — and has made steady strides in his 36 races with Ganassi since 2020.

"It's been tough. I did five years in Formula One, almost a hundred grand prixs, running for small teams, towards the back most of it. You don't get a lot of credit running in the back. People think you are not very good," Ericsson said. "I came over here, and people probably didn't think much of that. I had to work my way here as well, learning American racing.

"Moved here, put my whole life into trying to become an IndyCar and mainly Indianapolis 500 champion. It's been not easy. It feels good to show that hard works pay off."

Ericsson took control of the race late — largely because of teammate Scott Dixon's speeding penalty — and had the win in reach until a crash by Ganassi teammate Jimmie Johnson with four laps remaining brought out a rare red-flag stoppage at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

IndyCar is among the purest forms of motorsports and rarely throws artificial cautions or issues stoppages that might change the outcome. But the crowd of more than 300,000 — only a few thousand shy of a sellout and the largest sporting event since the start of the pandemic — roared when IndyCar called the cars to pit road.

The stoppage gave Pato O'Ward and the rest of the challengers almost 12 minutes on pit road to strategize how to pass Ericsson. Ericsson was agonizing his own plans.

"Those 10 minutes sitting there in the pit lane during that red flag was some of the hardest 10 minutes of my life," he said, "thinking what to do, thinking that I'm leading the biggest race in the world, and I'm that close to win it."

There were two laps remaining when the race resumed and Ericsson got the jump on O'Ward. The Mexican got one final look for the lead that Ericsson defended and O'Ward knew not to force the issue.

"Nah, he was going to put me in the wall if I had gone for it," O'Ward said.

Sage Karam crashed and brought out another caution on the final lap, allowing Ericsson to coast to the victory podium under yellow. Karam was transported to a hospital for evaluation of muscular soreness.

"When that caution came out, I thought it was going to be another restart. I was like, 'I can't believe it, another one,'" Ericsson said. "First I was angry, then I just realized that won me the race. It's an explosion of emotions from that point."

It was Ericsson's third IndyCar victory in 52 starts. But he arrived in Indianapolis convinced he could win the 500 based in part to the work he'd put into learning ovals and a third-place finish at Texas Motor Speedway in the warm-up for "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing."

"First I was angry, then I just realized that won me the race. It's an explosion of emotions from that point."

It is the fifth Indy 500 win for team owner Chip Ganassi, who caught a ride to the podium on the side of Ericsson's car. Ericsson is the first Swede to win the Indy 500 since Kenny Brack in 1999 and the second in 106 runnings of the race.

Ericsson poured his jug of milk all over his face, then handed the bottle to Ganassi so the boss could take his own swig. Ganassi had not won the 500 in 10 years and sent five legitimate contenders to Indy to end the drought.

The win seemed to belong to Dixon, the six-time IndyCar champion who went more than 234 mph in qualifying to win the pole. The New Zealander led 95 of the 200 laps, and his Honda was easily the fastest in the field — so fast that Dixon didn't slow down enough on his final pit stop.

The penalty took Dixon out of contention for the win.

That left Ericsson and Tony Kanaan still in the mix for Ganassi. Kanaan, at 47 the oldest driver in the field, thought he was in perfect position sitting fourth on the restart.

O'Ward wouldn't relent, though. He signed a contract extension with Arrow McLaren SP two days earlier and desperately wanted the win to celebrate his status as McLaren's star. But O'Ward finished second, falling just short as he tried to give Mexico a banner celebration on the biggest day in motorsports; Sergio Perez opened Sunday with a win in the Monaco Grand Prix.

Kanaan was third, followed by Felix Rosenqvist, another Swede, who drives for McLaren. Rosenqvist is in a contract year with McLaren and fighting for his job, but the McLaren group carried the Chevrolet banner at Indy as Juan Pablo Montoya finished 11th.

American drivers Alexander Rossi and Conor Daly finished fifth and sixth, Rossi for Andretti Autosport and Daly for Ed Carpenter Racing.

Helio Castroneves, last year's winner, finished seventh and one spot ahead of Meyer Shank Racing teammate Simon Pagenaud. Reigning IndyCar champion Alex Palou finished 10th in another Ganassi entry.

Dixon faded to 21st after the speeding penalty, and although he visited Ericsson on the victory podium, he was consoled by his wife on pit road after the race. Johnson finished 28th in his Indy 500 debut.

"It's one team, everybody roots for everybody else, everybody works together and everybody is an open book," Ganassi said. "You're going to have things happen in these 500-mile races and they're not always going to fall your way. So, you know, we were lucky to have five good cars and five good drivers." *(AP)* ▪

Byron signs 3-year extension with Hendrick

CONCORD, N.C. — William Byron has agreed to a three-year contract extension with Hendrick Motorsports that will keep him in the No. 24 Chevrolet through the 2025 season.

The 24-year-old Byron has two Cup Series wins already this season and four in his career. He made the playoffs for the third consecutive year in 2021 when he posted 20 top-10 finishes.

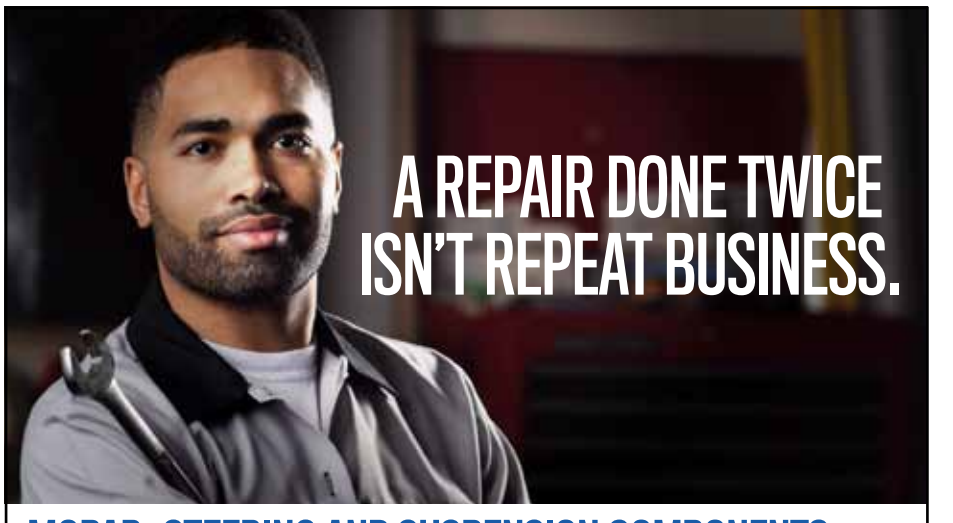
He was the 2017 Xfinity Series champion.

"With the great people around me, I'm excited to continue pursuing race wins and playoff success," Byron said. "Together we've built a No. 24 team that I know will contend for championships. I'm really looking forward to the rest of the season and my years to come with Hendrick Motorsports."

Hendrick Motorsports signed Byron in August 2016 when he was 18 years old. After his four-victory Xfinity Series title run in 2017, he advanced to the Cup level where he earned 2018 rookie of the year honors. Byron is the only Cup Series driver other than Hall of Famer and four-time champion Jeff Gordon to win for Hendrick in the No. 24 Chevrolet.

"William is on an amazing trajectory, and I believe he's only just begun to scratch the surface of his potential. We are fortunate to have him in our stable," team owner Rick Hendrick said.

Byron's' previous contract with Hendrick Motorsports ran through the end of the 2022 season. *(AP)* ▪



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Column: F1's hyped 1st trip to Miami a money-losing success

By Jenna Fryer

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — The Miami Grand Prix was hot, from the party scene to the weather, but it faced nearly impossible expectations.

The celebrity watching was top level, certainly for a motorsports event. There was Paris Hilton, using a portable fan to cool herself as she danced in front of the McLaren garage on race day. Serena and Venus Williams holding hands as they navigated the pre-race grid in summer dresses. Bad Bunny, the Puerto Rican entertainment icon, making a flashy entrance in an all-pink suit while hanging with Sergio Perez, Red Bull's Mexican driver.

There were tons of bells and whistles, too, from food halls, art installations, hammocks, chaise lounges to cabanas and a man-made beach. But did Formula One's debut in this sleek, cosmopolitan city measure up as a good event?

That all depends on personal expectations. The expectations were so high, after all.

F1 wants to tap into the rich North American sponsorship market as the series' popularity has swelled over the last three years. The United States was given two F1 races this season for the first time since 1984 and next year there will be three, with Las Vegas — the glitziest city of them all? — playing host.

Miami received a 10-year contract for its extravaganza at Hard Rock Stadium, where promoters built a 3.36-mile circuit through the parking lot and then went off the charts building the scene around it. Tickets never went on sale to the general public because of early interest and capacity was capped at 85,000 to create a pleasant — and exclusive — customer experience.

The track weaved around the stadium, under a highway overpass and around a fake marina that featured 10 yachts and a mini-Monaco backdrop. There were gondolas to ferry fans across the sprawling circuit, and a beach club that featured musical acts throughout the three-day weekend.

Many at this event were hooked on F1 by the Netflix behind-the-scenes docuseries "Drive To Survive." Each episode covers an entire storyline — sometimes multiple races — and it's been credited for exposing the glamorous F1 world to Americans. Netflix and F1 even waited for the series to arrive in Miami to announce "DTS" has been renewed for two more seasons.

The racing, alas, was just OK, 57 mostly uneventful laps on a track drivers did not like. Fernando Alonso said drivers complained to governing body FIA that "the tarmac is not F1 standard" and promoters twice had to repave portions of the track before the race.

The asphalt "almost feels like gravel," said Max Verstappen, the reigning world champion who won for the third time through the first five races of the season. He also said the chicane was suited for a kart race and not an F1 car.

"In the four laps I did on Friday, I almost knocked myself out because I hit the first curb and your head just bounced from left to right, like at least five, six times, but really bad," Verstappen said. "It's so slow and I think our cars look way better if it's a bit more of a flowing combination."

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The good news is that promoter Tom Garfinkel said before the race that organizers would listen to all feedback and make any changes required to improve the event, including track alterations.

He also was cognizant of other areas that fell short — hospitality inside the F1 paddock wasn't up to series standards on the opening day; pedestrian bridges across the campus were clogged; shade could be difficult to find — and said it would all be addressed even though the race won't make a profit in its first year.

"The expenses far exceeded our expectations," Garfinkel said. "But it was because we were trying to do everything we could to be first class, to be on brand for what Formula One is and the kind of event we wanted to deliver."

The event still had some of that classic F1 backroom drama with the FIA insisting it will enforce its ban on drivers wearing jewelry while competing. Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton protested by wearing three watches, eight rings and multiple necklaces, but ultimately removed everything but some piercings before getting in his car.

The FIA granted Hamilton a waiver for the next two races so he can make plans to have piercings he can't take out surgically removed. The Briton was to have all his piercings removed by the Monaco Grand Prix on May 29 or risk a fine of $308,000 (250,000 pounds).

Hamilton is having a terrible season by his standards. His spat with FIA has created speculation he will quit F1 and he suggested he might not bend on this issue, saying: "If they stop me, then so be it. We've got a spare driver."

Jewelrygate is the type of off-track drama that drew fans to "DTS" and helped F1 capture a U.S. audience. Hamilton finished sixth, one spot behind Mercedes teammate George Russell and the fourth time in five races he has finished behind Russell this season.

If something doesn't change, the next time fans see Hamilton racing in Miami might be the recap on Netflix in Season 5. *(AP)* ▪

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Kenseth, McGriff and Shelmerdine join NASCAR Hall of Fame

By Steve Reed

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Matt Kenseth was doing yardwork when wife Katie came outside with her phone in hand, letting him know he'd just been selected to the NASCAR Hall of Fame.

A short while later Kenseth "celebrated" the night by cooking dinner for his daughters.

"I never really thought about it," the even-keeled Kenseth said on a conference call about his chances of making the Hall of Fame.

Fellow driver Hershel McGriff and crew chief Kirk Shelmerdine were also selected to the NASCAR Hall of Fame. Mike Helton was named the Landmark Award winner for outstanding contributions to the sport.

They will officially be inducted into the Hall of Fame in a ceremony on Jan. 20.

Kenseth was a first-ballot selection, Shelmerdine was voted in on his third try on the modern day ballot. McGriff made the pioneer ballot on his seventh try.

The 50-year-old Kenseth, who recently ran the Boston Marathon, drove 18 full seasons on the NASCAR circuit before retiring in 2020 with 39 Cup victories and 20 poles. He's 21st on the career victory list with 39.

"I never looked forward (to the Hall of Fame) when I was racing and I never really looked back at some of the wins that I had," Kenseth said. "It was always the next race and what can I do better the next race?"

He called the selection an honor, saying "I am really grateful for everything this sport has done for me and my family."

Kenseth reached almost every major milestone in NASCAR.

He won the Daytona 500 twice, the Coca-Cola 600 and the All-Star race. He also captured the 2003 Cup Series championship capping a dominating season in which he led the points standings for the final 32 weeks of the season. He made the NASCAR playoffs in 13 of 14 seasons and finished runner-up twice.

Kenseth made an impact from the beginning, winning Cup Series rookie of the year in 2000. He also won 29 Xfinity Series races.

The 94-year-old McGriff won this first race at the 1950 Southern 500, in the NASCAR Cup Series' second season at the age of 22. His final NASCAR race was at Tucson Speedway in the Pro Series West in 2018 — at the age of 90.

He had the longest driving career ever in NASCAR.

"Racing has always been in me," McGriff said. "It was always been about the sport."

McGriff started 85 races in parts of 28 NASCAR Cup Series seasons, capturing four wins - all of those coming in 1954.

He was one of the best drivers in what is now known as the ARCA Menards Series West. Competing in parts of 35 seasons, McGriff won 37 races — third on the all-time on the West Series wins list. His signature year came in 1986 when he won the series title.

McGriff beat out the 87-year-old A.J. Foyt, who made 128 Cup Series starts over 30 years, winning seven races and finishing in the top 10 36 times.

The 64-year-old Shelmerdine worked as a crew chief from 1977-92 and won 46 races with 15 poles and helped Dale Earnhardt capture four Cup Series championships (1986, '87, '90, '91). Over his 16-year crew chief career with Earnhardt, Ricky Rudd, James Hylton and Richard Childress, he won 46 races and posted top-10 finishes in more than half his starts.

Shelmerdine said he was "in shock" that he got in, saying he thought "it would be a few more years before it happened."

Shelmerdine said being reunited with Earnhardt and car owner Richard Childress in the NASCAR Hall of Fame is special.

"It's always been a surreal thing for me being in the middle of all these legends," Shelmerdine said. "As the years go by the stats pile up and and you start to be in the sentence with it all."

Shelmerdine said everyone had their own role on those winning teams and simply fit together well. "Everything just clicked together," he said.

Helton was the first person outside of the France family to be named NASCAR president. *(AP)* ■



Speedway Motorsports vows to keep Dover on NASCAR slate

By Dan Gelston

DOVER, Del. — Chase Elliott took note that Dover's grandstands passed the eye test and looked fuller before rain washed out the conclusion of the race.

A track that scaled down in size — and races — in recent years had full sections, hundreds of fans crowded the entertainment events chasing driver autographs, and the turnout for a country music concert seemed fitting for a popular act on the property's yearly music festival.

At least one Delaware native loved the scene.

"This is like a festival atmosphere," actor and pace car driver Ryan Phillippe said. "What's going on outside with the concerts, and inside, it feels like way more than just a race for me."

The advertising tarps that once covered empty sections at Dover Motor Speedway went the way of the rain that weekend: Totally gone.

"That was a great crowd we had yesterday," Elliott said after he won the race on Monday. "Biggest crowd I have seen here personally since I've been racing, which I thought was really cool. Proud to see that."

Dover's attendance rebound following two years of pandemic restrictions — and shrinking turnout for more than a decade even before 2020 — was the boost the track needed in its first race under new management.

Long independently owned, Speedway Motorsports bought Dover Motorsports late last year and added the Monster Mile to its growing collection of tracks. And who doesn't want to impress the new boss, especially when the boss — in this case, Speedway Motorsports President Marcus Smith — worked the Dover gates and greeted fans with the track short-staffed.

Dover had already moved its fall race to a new location. Perhaps a poor showing this year would have made Speedway Motorsports strongly consider bumping Dover off the slate completely to a sexier new site. The old mile concrete track still has legs: Speedway Motorsports COO Mike Burch said the plan was to keep Dover on the NASCAR schedule just as its been since 1969.

"Nobody has ever looked at making changes to thriving events," Burch said. "If the fans want us to continue to have races here, the racing is good, the support is here, yes, absolutely."

Dover's second race was transferred last season to Nashville Superspeedway. Speedway Motorsports property New Hampshire Motor Speedway, a track with anemic attendance, kept its summer date but had its September race weekend moved to Las Vegas in 2018. Pocono, which ran doubleheader weekends each of the last two years, lost a race this season to the Raceway at Gateway in the St. Louis region.

For those keeping score, that's three lost dates in the Northeast corridor in a span of just four years. But the bleeding may stop.

"Given where we are, there just has never been any kind of discussion about us losing a race," Dover President Mike Tatoian said. "I have no reason to believe we will not be racing here for a long period of time."

Burch said NASCAR's footprint in the region may have changed, but the series isn't intent on deserting the area. The road course at Watkins Glen in New York races in August. NASCAR dumped tracks in the Chicago area and Kentucky over the last few years in favor of reinvigorated markets like Nashville, or tried bold ideas in new ones like racing on an asphalt track inside Memorial Coliseum.

The industry has remained bullish on reimagining its schedule, leaving no guarantee the same old tracks your grandparents visited will be around for you to take your grandkids.

"I don't think there's any desire to leave a market," Burch said. "But if you want to open up new markets, unfortunately, in order to go to different markets, you have to look at losing a race. But you really have to think long and hard before you abandon a market altogether."

The reality is, no developer is building tracks, meaning any potential new dates would have to be held in man-made entertainment sites (like in Los Angeles), city street races, or millions would have to be invested in rehabbing old tracks such as the Nashville Fairgrounds.

"Can you support it long-term? I think you can be successful almost anywhere with an inaugural event," Burch said. "We certainly saw that when we went to Nashville last year. Or the Circuit of Americas. The key is, is it sustainable?"

Speedway Motorsports' purchase of Dover leaves Indianapolis Motor Speedway (good luck getting the key from Roger Penske) and Pocono Raceway as the last independent tracks. When it comes to Pocono, Burch said Speedway Motorsports is always open for business.

Burch raved about Dover's staff, from upper management to guest services, as well as the Monster Mile's proximity to major cities, how it's within walking distance of a casino/hotel, and the attractiveness of the Firefly Music Festival.

Burch said from what he saw at Dover, where the Monday turnout looked better than the average Xfinity Series race, it's sustainable as a NASCAR weekend over the long haul. And at Dover, which had kiosks offering a free gift for fans who locked in 2023 tickets on site, drivers stumped to keep the race on the schedule. But as fans from all over the region hopped on the golf cart, Burch had a simple solution for those worried about the track's fate.

Next time, bring a friend. Or two or three. Because Dover is a great place to race, "as long as it's supported." *(AP)* ■

Triple threat: Hall of Famer Martin honored at Darlington

By Pete Iacobelli

DARLINGTON, S.C. — Hall of Famer Mark Martin was a major presence at Darlington Raceway, just like he usually was during his stellar NASCAR career.

Martin had not one, not two but three commemorative throwback schemes in his honor when the "Lady In Black" celebrated NASCAR history with its races recently.

"It means so much, I can't even tell you," Martin told The AP by phone this week leading up to NASCAR's three top series running at Darlington.

After the Friday night trucks race, the Xfinity Series raced on Saturday before the main event on Mother's Day with the Goodyear 400.

Martin was remembered much of the weekend. Brad Keselowski, in his first season driving the No. 6 for Roush Fenway, drove a blue-and-white scheme that Martin ran for Jack Roush in 2004.

Martin loved Darlington's tight straightaways and the challenge of its two different corners that force drivers to come oh-so-close to the wall if they want to run up front. He's grateful for the success he's had here, but when asked about Darlington memories, he pointed to a couple of runner-up finishes — both to the late Dale Earnhardt — in 1989 and 1990.

Alex Bowman, in Hendrick Motorsports' No. 48, piloted a red-white-and-blue machine that looked like the one Martin used in 1993 to win the first of his two Southern 500s at Darlington. Brett Moffitt went way back in Martin's history with his No. 2 car in the Xfinity race, mimicking the car Martin ran his rookie year in 1982.

Darlington, NASCAR's oldest superspeedway that opened in 1950, has found a niche on the Cup Series schedule with it yearly throwback celebration, a sort of "Old Timer's Day" for the sport's history.

"We've had lots of Hall of Famer racers honored at Darlington," raceway president Kerry Tharp said. "But I can't remember anyone getting three tributes the same weekend."

It was enough to lure Martin away from his enjoyable life as a retiree in Montana to make a rare on-track appearance at Darlington.

"It was Moffitt," Martin said about why he came East. "He took a time when no one knew who I was was or wanted anything to do with me. I had to show up."

Not too soon after Martin's start, he routinely showed up on everyone's radar. He finished with 40 wins in the Cup series, good for 20th all-time. Martin was a modern-day master at Darlington, where the egg-shaped, 1.366-mile layout is an acquired taste for NASCAR's best.

In 12 races at Darlington between March 1989 and April 1994, Martin had 10 top-five finishes and only once ended worse than sixth. In 2009, the then 50-year-old Martin outraced Hendrick teammate Jimmie Johnson to capture the Southern 500.

Martin holds the record for Xfinity wins at Darlington with eight, all accomplished over a 15-race span between 1993 and 2000.

His secret? Simple, he says, just use the same setup each time. "It was the magic," he said.

Martin loved Darlington's tight straightaways and the challenge of its two different corners that force drivers to come oh-so-close to the wall if they want to run up front. He's grateful for the success he's had here, but when asked about Darlington memories, he pointed to a couple of runner-up finishes — both to the late Dale Earnhardt — in 1989 and 1990.

They were among Martin's six second places in his Darlington Cup career.

"We ran good but it wasn't good enough," Martin said. "That's what I think about more than any of those wins we had."

Martin, now 63, was elected to the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2017 and has largely remained out of the spotlight as a former racing star.

Keselowski said he and Martin speak every so often, mostly about life. Few understand what it's like to be the face of Roush Fenway Racing, as Martin was during the bulk of his career. Martin won 35 of his 40 Cup events with Roush.

"It's always good catching up with him," Keselowski said. (*AP*) ■



Rear View

1973 Volkswagen SP2

By Jay Hirsch

First started in 1953, Volkswagen of Brazil (VWB) not only sold Volkswagens, it also engineered and made cars exclusively for the South American market.

By the late 1960s the Brazilian government basically closed the car market to all imports due to prohibitive import taxes. The government wanted to help the growth of the automobile industry in Brazil. Because of this high import tax most automobiles at this time had to be made in Brazil. The only sports-type car sold by Volkswagen was the Volkswagen Karmann Ghia, which was showing its age.

Rudolf Leiding, who was in charge of VWB, instructed his staff to design a car that would replace the Karmann Ghia. He also wanted to make VWB independent from Volkswagen of Germany. The other sports type cars sold in Brazil were the Puma, Santa Matilde, and the Miura.

The car in 1969 that Leiding had in mind to replace the Karmann Ghia was designed by Marcio Piancastelli and was called Project X. When the car was introduced in 1973 it was regarded as a work of art. The SP2's design was compared quite favorably with more expensive sports cars of the period. As for performance, that was something else. The letters "SP" were for Sao Paulo, where the car was designed and built.

The SP2 was priced slightly more than the VW Varient. The Variant was called the Squareback or 1600 in the United States. In Brazil the Variant was also made as a fastback. It cost $2,499; the VW Beetle was $1,839; and the SP2 was $2,600.

The SP2 was built on the platform of the Brazilian VW 1600. It had the front suspension of the VW Beetle. The engine was an air-cooled 103-cid/1.7 liter-four-cylinder engine which put out an under-whelming 75 horsepower. This lack of power led to the eventual downfall of the SP2.

Despite its sleek shape, the SP was significantly slower than the Puma. Although both models had very similar engines, the Puma was much lighter with a fiberglass body, weighing only 1,600 pounds. The SP2 had an all-steel body and weighed 1,962 pounds. The Puma did 0 to 60 in 11 seconds, where as the SP2 went from 0 to 60 in 17.4 seconds…not exactly a neck-breaking experience.

On the plus side the SP2 had two trunks, one in the front and a storage area behind the front seat above the rear engine, which was accessible with the hatchback open or from the front of the passenger compartment. The SP2's all-steel body was of excellent fit and finish, but the added weight was just a little too much for that 1.7-liter engine.

There was talk with Volkswagen of Germany to market the car in Europe with a larger engine. Volkswagen of Germany decided against this as they had the new 914 Porsche and did not want an SP2 competing against it. But Volkswagen of Germany did keep the design plan on file which eventually would become the water-cooled front engine 924. The SP2 could have become a cousin to the Porsche 911 if it had a more powerful engine.

The SP2 is a well-built car — it feels solid with much attention to detail. The seats are very comfortable, the gauges easy to read, and forward visibility is excellent. Due to the sloping angle of the glass on the hatchback the same cannot be said of it. Entering the car is not only hindered by the cars height of 45 inches but also the design of the roof — it curves downward, so when entering the SP the height is closer to 43 inches and the floor of the car is not lowered much. Entering and exiting require one to step up while at the same time lower one's head and upper body. This may have been overlooked by many if — again that small word which is so big — if the car had performance to go with that design.

Another drawback is the brake and clutch pedal. By 1973 most if not all cars had brake and clutch pedals that were suspended. The pedals were not thru the floor. You have to push either pedal at least half way down to either shift or engage the brake. Driving a car with brake and clutch pedals thru the floor is quite an experience! It also takes more leg muscle.

Another inconvenience: While the brake pedal is big due to it being thru the floor, it is set back further from the firewall than the accelerator pedal, which is against the floor. So the driver cannot go from accelerator to brake in one quick maneuver.

Finally, the SP2 has no windows in the front doors; there are plastic curtains that snap into place. There is either full ventilation with no curtains in place or limited ventilation with the curtains in place, and the rear quarter windows popped opened

The SP2 is 45 inches tall, 63.4 inches wide, 165.8 inches long with a wheelbase of 94.5 inches, and rides on 185/70 x 14 tires in the front and 195/70 x 14 tires in the rear. The car weighs 1,962 lbs and has a four-speed, floor-mounted transmission with the air-cooled VW engine in the rear

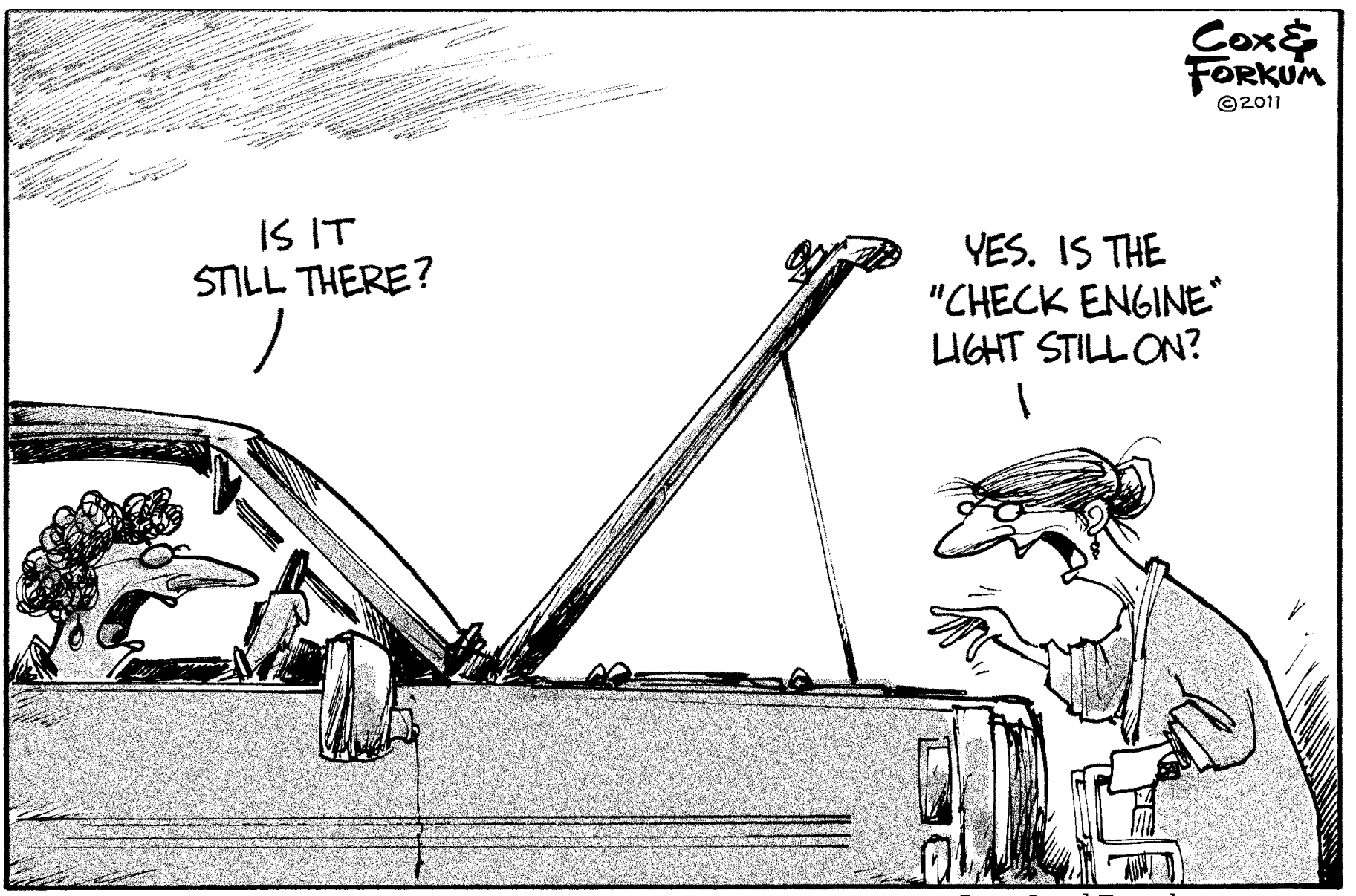
The SP was given the nickname "Sem Potencia," which in Portuguese means "without power." There were a total 10,205 SP2s manufactured, with 670 SPs exported, 155 to Nigeria and the rest to European countries other than Germany. None were ever exported to the United State from 1973 to 1975.

Today the car has become a "cult car." Some owners have replaced the underpowered original flat four-cylinder engines with a Porsche 911 six-cylinder engine. The few that are in the United States were brought here independently, not by Volkswagen. Prices could range from $25,000-$40,000. ▪





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