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GM Oshawa gets low marks

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General Motors assembly plants in Oshawa are near the bottom of the parent company's list in productivity in North America, says a study by a prominent industry consulting firm.

The two GM car assembly operations also rank among the lowest against Canadian competitors in measuring how many worker days it takes to build a car, says Harbour and Associates Inc. of Troy, Mich.

On the other hand, Harbour noted in its report on industry competitiveness that Ford's Oakville plant is the fourth-most efficient car assembly operation among the North American-based auto makers while Chrysler's Bramalea factory ranked fifth.

"Chrysler and Ford operations in Canada are among the top in their respective companies," Jim Harbour, founder of the consulting firm, said in an interview yesterday. "GM is close to the bottom."

But Harbour, a retired director of corporate manufacturing engineering at Chrysler, has released specific figures for only a few of the 70 assembly plants in North America and would not say exactly how low the GM Canada plants ranked among them.

His firm's study revealed that GM's Number 1 Oshawa assembly plant needs 3.76 worker days to produce the Lumina while the Number 2 operation, which makes the Lumina and Regal models, needs 4.43 workers. The truck plant, which manufactures pickups, needs only 3.1 worker days.

GM is closing 21 plants around the world by 1995 and at least one of five operations

producing mid-sized cars is on the hit list. That has put the future of the two Oshawa plants in question, but GM has assured production into 1994.

Harbour's statistics – which rated 58 Big Three plants and 12 operations owned by offshore companies – are important in calculating productivity but are only a partial yardstick. The best way to measure it is by the total cost of production, said GM spokesperson Stew Low.

But GM refuses to reveal its production costs, claiming the information would aid its competitors.

Although the GM plants in Canada ranked low in the company's over-all list, the Number 1 and truck operations have improved substantially during the past two years, the study notes.

The Number 1 plant improved 23 per cent while the truck operation increased productivity by 22 per cent.

Harbour's study showed Ford's Oakville plant needs only 2.80 worker days to produce the Tempo and Topaz while Chrysler uses 3.03 employees per day to make the Concorde, Intrepid and Vision models at its Bramalea operation.

It revealed that Ford's St. Thomas plant needs 3.39 worker days to make the Crown Victoria. Chrysler's mini-van plant in Windsor uses 3.75 worker days per vehicle, the study says.

Measuring productivity

Since 1979, Ford has been the leader in productivity gains among Detroit automakers. Chrysler is catching up fast, but GM is plodding along.

Company	Location	Product	Wrkers per Unit*
Ford	Kansas City, Mo.	Tempo/Topaz	2.37
Ford	Atlanta, Ga.	Taurus/Sable	2.49
Ford	Chicago, Ill.	Taurus/Sable	2.49
Ford	Oakville, Ont.	Tempo/Topaz	2.80
Ford	Wayne, Mich.	Escort	3.03

*Excludes overtime and absenteeism

Closing the quality gap, 1980-1992

Company	Defects per 100 vehicles 1980	Problems per 100 vehicles 1989	Problems per 100 vehicles 1992
Japanese	205	119	117
Ford	670	143	125
GM	740	162	133
Chrysler	810	178	142
Europeans	270	204	161

SOURCE: Detroit Free Press; Automakers; J.D. Power and Associates. Based on customer feedback after 90 days of ownership.

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