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Volt sales fall in January

BY DAVID SHEPARDSON DETROIT NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU 238 COMMENTS

Washington- General Motors extended-range electric Chevrolet Volt had its worst sales month since August, as negative publicity over fire risks hurt vehicles sales in January.

GM sold just 603 Volts - above its sales in January 2011, but far below GM's best-ever sales month in December, when GM sold 1,529 Volts.

Last week, GM North America President Mark Reuss said sales of the Volt have been hurt by bad publicity.

Reuss said bad publicity from the government's investigation into fire risks of post-crash Volts is "definitely a component" of the decline in sales.

GM sold about 7,700 in 2011, below GM's target of 10,000. GM abandoned its sales target of 45,000 for 2012 last month, saying it would match "supply to demand."

GM was outsold by Nissan Motor Co.'s all-electric Leaf in 2011, as the Japanese automaker sold nearly 9,700 last year. Nissan said it sold 676 Leafs in January, down from 954 in December.

Nissan hopes to double Leaf sales this year.

Reuss said that when GM restarts production in February at its Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly plant, it will build Volts in a "very reasonable" volume. He said there is some pent-up export demand.

Reuss says Volt awareness has gone up over the last two months in the wake of publicity over the government's investigation.

GM is focused on rehabilitating the Volt's reputation. "It's a tough road, but we've got to do it," Reuss said.

Last week, Congress held a hearing into the Obama administration's handling of disclosure of a fire in a crash-tested Volt. GM Chairman and CEO Dan Akerson testified at that hearing. He said the Volt is safe, and that the Volt has become "a political punching bag." He said the Volt has suffered "collateral damage" because of two months of relentless bad publicity.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration closed its investigation into the Volt in January after finding no unreasonable risk to safety. GM has agreed to make some voluntary upgrades to the Volt to guard against fires in post-crash Volts, but stopped short of issuing a formal recall.

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