

New Fuso truck series launched in Chennai, India



Kai-Uwe Seidenfuss, Senior Vice President Mitsubishi Truck and Bus Corporation, Dr Albert Kirchman, President & CEO Mitsubishi Fuso Truck and Bus Corporation & Head-Trucks Asia with Marc Llistosella, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Daimler India Commercial Vehicles Pvt. Ltd. and Masashi Kogame, Senior Vice President, Director of Production Control Department, Mitsubishi Fuso Truck and Bus Corporation at the launch



New series of Fuso trucks kept in display



The production line

Deimler India Commercial Vehicles Pvt Ltd (DICV) launched the all news Fuso truck series meant for export to selected 15 Asian and African markets beginning first from Sri Lanka on May 23 in its state-of-the-art Oragadam factory in Chennai. Here some highlights of the unveiling ceremony and the Oragadam factory in Chennai. Some highlights of the event.
Text and pictures by M F Jabir after a tour in Chennai



State of the art medical centre at the factory premises



Test run paths



Daimler Factory in Chennai



Ford announced Thursday it would stop making vehicles at its unprofitable Australian plants in 2016 and axe 1,200 jobs, ending an era that began in 1925 with the legendary Model T.

Ford Australia chief executive Bob Graziano made the announcement as he revealed losses of Aus\$141 million (US\$136 million) after tax in the last financial year and Aus\$600 million over the last five years.

Graziano said the decision was the result of local manufacturing being “driven by increasingly challenging market conditions – including market fragmentation and the high cost of manufacturing”.

Australia has annual sales of about 1.1 million new vehicles, and customers have access to some 65 brands and 365 models, with Holden, a General Motors subsidiary, and Toyota the other key manufacturers.

Graziano said this made Australia one of the most competitive and crowded automotive markets in the world, and a strong currency was making it harder for domestic carmakers to compete with cheap imports.

“Given the fragmented marketplace and the low model volumes that result, we decided that manufacturing locally is no longer viable,” he said, adding that all alternatives had been considered.

“Our costs are double that of Europe and nearly four times Ford in Asia.

“The business case simply did not stack up, leading us to

Ford to halt car production in Australia in 2016



Ford cars sit on the forecourt at a Ford dealership in Sydney on May 23, 2016, after Ford announced it will cease making vehicles at its unprofitable Australian plants in 2016 and axe 1,200 jobs, having produced its first car in the country in 1925. Ford Australia chief executive Bob Graziano made the announcement as he revealed losses of Aus\$141 million (US\$136 million) after tax in the last financial year and Aus\$600 million over the last five years. AFP

the conclusion manufacturing is not viable for Ford in Australia in the long-term.” The jobs will go at Ford’s Broadmeadows and Geelong factories in Victoria state, which will close. While manufacturing will stop, Ford will remain in Australia as an importer and dealer, employing some 1,500 people.

The government said it had spoken with the chief executives of Holden and Toyota and been assured that both were committed to manufacturing in Australia, but concerns remain.

Last month Ford’s former global president Jac Nasser, now chairman at BHP Billiton, said the demise of Australian

car manufacturing was inevitable if one or more producers closed down.

“Let’s assume one of the three decide to exit Australia in terms of manufacturing, then you end up potentially with a sub-scale supplier infrastructure and, once that happens, I think it’s a domino effect,” he said.

“It would be a very sad day for Australia, but unfortunately it looks like it could be inevitable.” The automaking sector employs more than 50,000 people in Australia with another 250,000 jobs in associated industries.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union national president Paul Bastian said the Ford news was a “disaster” and voiced concern at the effect in the wider auto parts industry.

“We want to take the positives out of this. We want bipartisan support to see what we can do to ensure that we have an auto industry, that we have an industry that is sustainable,” he said.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard pledged Aus\$39 million to help the Geelong and Broadmeadows communities deal with the job losses, and demanded Ford make its own contribution.

“For those working people as they absorb this news I want to say to them we will make sure you are not left behind,” she said.

Australia’s auto industry is struggling with the effects of the high local dollar, which has traded near or above parity with the greenback for almost two years, squeezing exports and compounding rising production costs.

Canberra extended a Aus\$3.2 billion bailout to the ailing sector at the height of the global downturn and provided additional lifelines to Ford and Holden last year. AFP

Rocky road for electric car market

Coda Automotive, one of what had been a promising crop of electric car startups, filed for bankruptcy protection this month, and said it would reorganize around the electric storage market.

High-end electric car maker Fisker Automotive, which has had financial woes for months, announced meanwhile it was laying off 75 percent of its workforce, raising the prospect of defaulting on US government loans.

Electric cars are still coming to market from luxury maker Tesla, and from major automakers such as General Motors, Nissan and others, but the outlook has become murkier.

Analysts are divided on the outlook, but few believe President Barack Obama’s goal of getting one million electric cars on the market by 2015 will be met.

“It’s not like people are clamoring for these vehicles,” said Rebecca Lindland, analyst with Rebel Three Media, and member of a committee studying barriers to electric cars for the National Academy of Sciences.

Lindland said her view that Americans “just don’t see how an electric car can fit into their lifestyle. We continue to be risk-averse in investing in new technology in our cars.” Mike VanNieuwkuyk of the research firm JD Power & Associates said more people are aware of the electric cars on the market “but there is still a low number of consumers who say they would purchase an electric car.” A report by JD Power and its partner LMC Automotive found battery-powered vehicles’ share of US auto

sales was just 0.08 percent in 2012, and predicts this will reach only 0.47 percent by 2015.

Only about three percent in the survey said their next vehicle would likely have a battery-electric powertrain.

VanNieuwkuyk said consumers are held back by a lack of plug-in charging stations, concerns about the range of the vehicle before it needs recharging, and especially the high cost.

At the same time, the analyst said, gasoline-powered cars “are improving enough to meet the needs of the consumer,” without the price tag of electric cars.

Jason Kavanagh, engineering editor at the research firm Edmunds.com said recent surveys suggest pure electric vehicles are unlikely to get past one percent of the US market, even by 2040.

The lack of range and long recharging times are key factors.

“Sitting around for eight hours waiting for your (Nissan) Leaf to charge up is not exactly a selling point,” he said. “EVs have a sitting-on-your-ass factor that conventional cars do not.” More important, said Kavanagh, is that the US electric power system cannot support large numbers of electric vehicles which need constant charging.

“The US power grid is not capable of supporting that,” he told AFP. “You would need a multitude of small nuclear power stations to support that recharging.” Chevrolet cut production of its Volt last year amid soft demand, and is reported to be working on a less expensive version. AFP