GM productivity last

Plants around Ohio earn mixed reviews

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General Motors Corp. is the least productive of the six major automakers in North America, according to a study released yesterday by Harbour & Associates Inc., a manufacturing consulting firm.

The study was released as General Motors remains locked in the sixth week of a strike by United Auto Workers in Flint, an action prompted by GM's insistence that it must cut costs.

The study found that Ford Motor Co. is the best of the domestic automakers when it comes to productivity in manufacturing vehicles in North America. "Ford is very competitive, even with the Japanese," said James Harbour, the Troy, Mich., firm's president.

Overall, however, the Japanese automakers were the most efficient, led by Nissan and followed by Toyota and Honda.

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Those rankings were based on the number of labor hours required to build the engine and body parts and assemble a vehicle during 1997.

The study showed:

Nissan, which builds vehicles including the Altima in Smyrna, Tenn., requires 27.64 hours per vehicle.

Toyota, which builds vehicles including the Camry in Georgetown, Ky., requires 31.82 hours per vehicle.

Honda, which builds Civics and Accord in East Liberty, Ohio, and Marysville, Ohio, requires 32.93 hours per vehicle.

Ford requires 34.71 hours per vehicle.

Chrysler Corp. requires 45.52 hours per vehicle.

General Motors requires 46.52 hours per vehicle.

Harbour estimated that Ford passed Chrysler in 1997 to become the most profitable automaker in the survey with an average pre-tax profit per vehicle of $1,520, compared with $1,336 for Chrysler. General Motors, meanwhile, had a $104 loss per vehicle, largely because of strikes last year.

Without the strikes, GM would have made about $825 per vehicle, Harbour said. But that would still leave GM almost $700 behind Ford in profits per vehicle.

The study also ranked assembly plants on efficiency. Second overall among plants building minivans was the Ohio Assembly Plant in Avon Lake, which builds the Mercury Villager and Nissan Quest. The top-ranked plant builds Ford Windstars in Canada.

Ford's Engine Plant No. 2 in Brook Park, which builds the Duratec V-6, did not make the top 10 list. Harbour said he had visited the plant, which he described as "great," but he said the lack of demand last year for the Duratec hurt its productivity rating. Demand for the Duratec has increased significantly during 1998, and Harbour said he expects the rating to improve significantly next year.

Among the three North American plants building large vans, the Lorain Assembly plant, which builds the Econoline, was first, followed by General Motors and Chrysler. The Japanese do not build any full-size vans.

The bad news for Ohio was that the Lordstown assembly plant, which builds the Chevrolet Cavalier and Pontiac Sunfire, was ninth out of the 10 plants building subcompact cars.