

US automakers outpaced rivals in 2010

AFP, Chicago

The Detroit Three US automakers outpaced most of their rivals in 2010 and on Tuesday predicted strong sales growth in 2011 as they reap the rewards of years of painful restructuring.

The strong 2010 results -- Ford up 19 percent, Chrysler up 17 percent and General Motors up six percent -- come as overall industry sales recover from the worst downturn in decades which thrust GM and Chrysler into government-backed bankruptcies.

They also come at the expense of Toyota, which saw sales remain at depressed 2009 levels after its once-stellar reputation was damaged by a series of mass safety recalls.

Total US auto sales rose 11.1 percent to 11.59 million vehicles in 2010 from 10.43 million in 2009, according to Autodata.

However, that is still significantly below the 15 to 17 million vehicles sold every year from 1994 through 2007.

Ford, which managed to survive the economic downturn without government aid, was the biggest winner as its sales rose 19 percent to 1.94 million vehicles.

Ford regained the number two spot from Toyota as it expanded US market share for the second year in a row to 16.7 percent -- the first back-to-back market share increase since 1993.

"With our balanced line of high-quality, fuel-efficient products, we have a solid foundation to deliver more sales and improved results in 2011," said Ken Czubay, Ford vice president for US marketing, sales and service.

"Consideration for Ford is increasing beyond our traditional areas of strength -- signaling that the seeds of growth already have taken hold."

Ford said it expects global auto sales to reach record levels of 75 to 85 million vehicles in 2010 with US auto sales in the



Ford Sport Utility vehicles are lined up for delivery at the Dearborn Truck assembly plant in Dearborn, Michigan. The strong 2010 results -- Ford up 19 percent, Chrysler up 17 percent and General Motors up six percent -- come as overall industry sales recover from the worst downturn in decades

AFP

range of 12.5 to 13.5 million.

GM had a more robust forecast for 2011 US sales -- 13 to 13.5 million vehicles -- and said it was well positioned for gains after sales rose 6.3 percent to 2.2 million vehicles in 2010.

GM, which emerged from bankruptcy in July 2009 and launched the world's biggest initial stock offering in November, noted that its four remaining brands sold 118,435 more vehicles this year than the company's eight brands in 2009.

However, its market share nonetheless slipped 0.7 points to 19.1 percent, according to Autodata.

"Our sales this year reflect the impact of GM's new business model," said Don Johnson, vice president of US sales operations.

"The consistency of results that we achieved demonstrates the focus on our brands, dealers and customers, and how we compete aggressively for every sale, every day."

Chrysler attributed its solid gains to the business plan developed by Fiat's Sergio Marchionne, who took the helm after Chrysler emerged from bankruptcy in June 2009.

"We are extremely proud of the sales strides we made during this transition year," said Fred Diaz, Chrysler's lead executive for US sales.

The automaker launched 16 all-new or significantly improved models last year, most of them during the fourth quarter.

Chrysler's sales rose 17 percent to 1.09 million vehicles in 2010 after posting nine straight months of growth culminating in a 16 percent year-on-year gain for December. Its share of the US market rose 0.5 points to 9.4 percent.

Toyota's share of the US market dropped 1.8 points to 15.2 percent after 2010 sales shrank by 0.4 percent to 1.76 million vehicles after falling 5.5 percent to 177,488 in December.

"We're coming off what was arguably the most challenging time in our 53 year history," in the United States, said Don Esmond, senior vice president of automotive operations for Toyota Motor Sales, USA.

"I know we've never headed into a new year with as much excitement and anticipation as we are in 2011."

Toyota had a more conservative forecast for 2011 US sales of just 12.5 million vehicles, but expects 2012 sales to reach 13.7 million.

Samsung to invest \$38.3b in 2011

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's Samsung Group said Wednesday it plans to invest almost 40 billion dollars this year as it tries to get ahead of global rivals still struggling after the financial crisis.

The nation's largest conglomerate, which accounts for almost 20 percent of South Korea's gross domestic product, will spend 43.1 trillion won (38.3 billion dollars) on a range of sectors, including research and development.

Its plans also include employing a record 25,000 staff this year, 11 percent up on 2010.

Samsung said more than two thirds of the cash -- 29.9 trillion won -- will go on expanding or building new plants producing semiconductors, liquid crystal display panels and other electronics.

A further 12.1 trillion won will be allocated to research and development.

The new total investment, up 18 percent from last year, is aimed at reaffirming the "global market dominance of Samsung's major businesses," the group said in its 2011 investment plan.

Projected investment in semiconductor plants amounts to 10.3 trillion won.

"Uncertainties over the global economy still persist, but we have reached the decision... in an effort to beef up the global competitiveness of our flagship businesses," Samsung said in a statement.

Samsung is at the head of South Korea's drive to boost growth through active investment in next-generation industries and Chairman Lee Kun-Hee has urged his group to diversify into biomedical research and green industries.

The new investment plan also reflects an overall shift in the country's major growth drivers, said Chang Suk-In, a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade.

"Samsung has a long history of making well-timed, preemptive investments in new businesses, for instance semiconductors, when industry rivals" are reluctant, he said.

"It's a perfect time to make preemptive investments and take a lead in new industries when companies in advanced nations are still reeling from the economic downturn and don't have the luxury of making large new investments," Chang said.

China likely to use stronger yuan

AFP, Beijing

A stronger exchange rate is likely to be one of the tools China uses to curb inflation in the first quarter, a government economist said Wednesday, as Beijing tries to stem a flood of liquidity.

Other measures to rein in soaring prices will include interest rate hikes and increasing the amount of money banks must keep in reserve, Ba Shusong wrote in the Economic Information Daily.

"Whether looking at it in terms of limiting inflation, or reducing internal and external imbalances, there is more room to adjust the yuan exchange rate in 2011 than in 2010," said Ba, a deputy director-general of the Financial Research Institute under the State Council's Development Research Centre.

China maintains a tight grip on the yuan exchange rate, despite pledging last June to let the currency trade more freely against the dollar.

A stronger yuan will reduce the cost of imports and make China's exports more expensive, which could dampen demand for Chinese-made products and reduce the flood of foreign currency flowing into China, which has fuelled inflation.

Ba said the consumer price index, a key measure of inflation, could increase by five to six percent in the first half.

Inflation topped five percent in November for the first time in more than two years on the back of

Consumer Electronics fair steals the show

REUTERS, Los Angeles

For a technophobe, the annual Consumer Electronics Show can be an intimidating place. But an enthusiast might feel a bit more like a small child who has been unleashed at FAO Schwarz.

There's a frenetic vibe at the show -- and millions of dazzling lights -- as more than 100,000 visitors weave their way through the crowded Las Vegas Convention Center to check out cutting-edge technology on display during the four-day convention, running Thursday through Sunday.

This year, the most closely watched product categories will include tablets, smartphones, connected TVs and 3D TVs. Topics that will be discussed are the macro trends driving the future of consumer electronics and entertainment -- whether you're setting up your home entertainment system or completing your studio's 3D development budget. Here's a sneak peek.

3D

Expect stakeholders to tub-thump the 3D format. A growing selection of 3D-ready technologies are now on the market following CES's 2010 preview of 3D TVs, laptops, Blu-ray players and consumer cameras.

3D glasses, however, have been a sticking point. While a few select pairs have been announced for universal use, such as eyewear from Xpand, they're generally incompatible across all TV brands. So if your neighbors don't have the same brand TV set you do, coming together for a Super Bowl party might not be a practical idea. They're pricey, too, some running \$150 a pair. This dilemma could change as companies have been working to identify a standard that will work with all major set manufacturers' systems.

But why use glasses at all? Industry veteran Peter Fannon, Panasonic's vp technology policy, suggests that glasses-free 3D could soon come in the form of handheld devices and digital signage -- though not yet 3D TVs. "Most manufacturers would say a real no-glasses 3D experience on a large TV is many years away," he said. "We can demo how it could work. But it isn't comfortable or an acceptable situation. It requires to sit perfect still (and at a single angle)."



Rohan Marley, son of late Reggae musician Bob Marley, displays a Marley Jammin' Roots Rock Speakerbag from House of Marley at the Venetian for the 2011 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada on Tuesday.

AFP

4G

The fourth generation of wireless technology will be front and center at CES.

"It means getting closer to a broadband-like environment on a mobile device," explained Shawn DuBravac, CEA's chief economist and director of research. "If one can get a broadband experience on a mobile, it changes what that person can do on the device. You could see changes in services being offered."

"4G really paves the way for wireless HD," said Edward Lichty, online VOD service VUDU's general manager. "It would allow us to leverage our strength in HD."

Still, there's room for debate as to the importance of 4G, as some technology veterans see it as simply an incremental speed improvement versus 3G.

CONNECTED EVERYTHING

Imagine being able to access the Web anywhere, anytime, from any device. TVs? Connected. Phones? You bet. Tablets, video game consoles, Blu-ray players? Absolutely.

But that's just the start. Soon, "other

devices like outlets, alarm clocks and coffee pots (will be connected) as we build an 'Internet of things' they will do things on our behalf," DuBravac said. "We will start to see the first level of artificial intelligence integrated into these devices."

IN-VEHICLE TECHNOLOGY

Your car will soon be as connected as your office.

"The future is a vehicle that is connected all the time and information that is brought to the driver and passengers in a way that useful to them," said Jim Buczkowski, Henry Ford fellow and director of global electrical and electronics systems engineering at Ford Motor Co. That could mean streaming entertainment to passengers or real-time information such as traffic reports to drivers.

"The move from 3G to 4G is a strong enabler," he added. "As the technology moves forward, so does our ability to provide more services to the vehicle" including WiFi connections and new apps.

The automotive sector is also looking at voice and gestural controllers as a safety feature.

Taiwan plans to import 'world's cheapest car' from India

AFP, Taipei

A Taiwanese firm plans to start importing the Indian-made Nano, the world's cheapest car, targeting the island's millions of motorcyclists as potential buyers, a company official said Wednesday.

"We're working on it," said an official at TECO Electric and Machinery Co, a Taipei-based conglomerate with businesses ranging from home appliances and telecommunications equipment to IT systems and commercial electronics.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, declined to give any further details, such as a timetable for when the imports can begin.

Industry observers said the snub-nosed, jelly-bean shaped mini car, produced by Tata Motors, could find a ready audience among low-income Taiwanese currently riding scooters and motorbikes.

"Cars like that may be welcomed by local commuters on two wheels who are unable to afford higher-priced cars, as they can offer shelter from heat and rain," said Torea Lin, editor of Taipei-based AG Auto Graphic magazine.

Taiwan, an island of 23 million, had 14.6 million scooters and motorcycles at the end of December, according to statistics compiled by the transportation ministry.

Local media said an upgraded version of the Nano -- to be equipped with air conditioners, power windows and air bags -- could carry a price tag of around 270,000 Taiwan dollars (\$8,940).

Dell buying IT security firm SecureWorks

AFP, Las Vegas

US computer giant Dell said Tuesday it has reached an agreement to buy information technology security firm SecureWorks.

Financial details of the transaction were not disclosed. "The frequency and sophistication of attacks on technology infrastructure and malicious attempts to access data, requires reliable, capable and innovative information security," Peter Altabet, president of Dell Services, said in a statement.

"SecureWorks is a recognized industry leader in information security services and its offerings and expertise will immediately enhance our solutions portfolio," Altabet said.

SecureWorks, founded in 1999, has 700 employees and projected 2010 revenue of more than 120 million dollars.

The Atlanta, Georgia-based firm has more than 2,900 clients in 70 countries including mid-sized businesses and companies in the financial services, utilities, health care, retail and manufacturing sectors.