Autoliv makes BMW 7 series pedestrian friendly

Autoliv supplies the new BMW 7 series with an optional night vision/pedestrian detection system. This is the first worldwide launch of pedestrian detection on a production car. Using a grille-mounted high-resolution infrared camera, a computer alerts the driver that there are pedestrians at risk of being hit by the vehicle. The 7 series also is the first BMW to feature both lane-departure warning, from Continental and vision specialists Mobileye, and a blind-spot warning system, from Hella. The lane-departure warning uses a camera to monitor road markings. If the vehicle drifts out of the lane, the system vibrates the steering wheel to alert the driver of the problem.

Steven Wingett

Mazda2 might cannibalize Mazda3 US sales, boss says

Hans Greimel

Automotive News Europe

HIROSHIMA, Japan • Mazda President Hisakazu Imaki says the company is holding off on a US launch of its Mazda2 small-segment car out of fear it might cannibalize sales of the lower-medium Mazda3.

Dealers have been clamoring for the Mazda2, which is the automaker’s top seller in Europe. The Mazda2, known as the Demio in Japan, would be a natural competitor for the Honda Fit, which is holding off from a US launch of its Jazz in Europe, and Toyota’s top seller in Europe, as North America drives switch to more fuel-efficient cars.

The concern is that the Mazda2 might eat into that success or be ignored by car buyers as gasoline prices fall in the US, he said.

“The Mazda2 is a very good product, and we’ve received very strong requests from dealers. But it is still under study,” Imaki said about a possible North American debut. “But I must also say that I don’t regret that we haven’t been able to supply the car thus far.

“One of the biggest factors the decision hasn’t been made is that the Mazda3 is still enjoying strong sales,” Imaki said. The concern is that the Mazda2 might eat into that success or be ignored by car buyers as gasoline prices rise in the US, he said.

The Mazda2 is the company’s best-selling car in the US. Still, sales were down 0.6 percent at 84,227 units from January to August.

Honda to debut around-view camera

Hans Greimel

Automotive News Europe

TOKYO • Honda Motor has rolled out two new safety technologies that will debut in cars by the end of the year, as well as a more reliable crush dummy to reduce pedestrian injuries.

Honda’s new camera system gives a bird’s eye view of the car to help with parking and improves visibility at intersections. The system uses four wide-angle cameras and will be available in the redesigned Odyssey medium minivan that goes on sale next month in Japan.

The technology is similar to that developed by Nissan Motor, but the Honda solution also can be used to navigate tight quarters and see around corners at intersections.

A computer synthesizes images from the front and rear cameras to compile the aerial view. Separately, Honda has developed a new driver’s side airbag that deploys in controlled stages, instead of one explosive burst. The idea is to increase the deployment speed and the amount of time the bag remains inflated to reduce bodily impact.

A computer also monitors the deployment speed of the side airbag. Since the side airbag deploys in stages, the computer can determine the direction that needs to be pursued.

The new i-SRS airbag will debut in January 2009 in the Life minivan. It uses a spiral-shaped seam and gas release valve to ensure speedily, but controlled, inflation.

It was unclear when either of these technologies will be introduced overseas. Honda Executive Vice President Koichi Kondo says safety and the environment underpin all future product plans: “These two elements will determine the direction that needs to be pursued.”

Inchcape sells Volvo dealerships in UK

John Revill

Automotive News Europe

Inchcape has sold five of six Volvo dealerships in the UK for £14.3 million.

UK’s strategy is now to concentrate on the premium segment of the car market, which Inchcape serves through its Lexus, BMW, Mercedes and Audi franchises.

In the first half of the year, Inchcape’s pre-tax profits increased 8.6 percent to £103.3 million. The company’s strong growth in emerging markets compensated for worsening trading conditions in the UK and Belgium. Inchcape said in July, Lacroix said the money from the sale would be invested in the company’s overseas operations, which increased revenue by 5.4 percent in the first six months of 2008.

Earlier this year the dealer group spent £100.3 million to buy a 75 percent stake in the Musa Motors Group in Russia.

Lacroix said in the statement: “We will re-allocate the proceeds into our fast-growing emerging markets businesses.”

Inchcape has 140 dealerships in the UK and 306 globally in countries including Russia, Belgium, Greece, China and Australia.