

final assembly

► **GM earnings:** Go to autonews.com on Thursday for coverage of General Motors' second-quarter financial report.



Ellesmere Port workers celebrated the new Vauxhall Astra in September by creating the Union Jack. Now, a report says production could move.

GM most likely to say cheerio to U.K., report finds

Of all manufacturers building cars in the U.K., analysts say General Motors is the one most likely to shift its operations to mainland Europe if costs rise on the back of the country's decision to leave the European Union.

GM builds the Vauxhall/Opel Astra subcompact in Ellesmere Port in northwest England, but there was a "high" risk it would shift production to Germany or Poland, LMC Automotive said in a report. Doing so would protect the company should the EU decide to impose import tariffs on U.K. exports as a result of the Brexit. Closing the plant most likely would happen around 2021, when the replacement for the recently launched Astra arrives, LMC said.

Ellesmere Port is at risk because it has the lowest parts localization of any volume maker in the U.K., at around 25 percent, believes Garel Rhys, emeritus professor of motor industry economics at the U.K.'s Cardiff Business School. "It has a low anchorage, so in that sense, it's the most vulnerable," he said. GM has been making cars in the factory there since 1964.

A Vauxhall spokesman said it is "business as usual" until the U.K. thrashes out an agreement with the EU on their future relationship.

Steady Audi hits 80 months of sales gains

Audi's string of year-on-year sales gains stretched to 80 months in June.

We don't know whether that's a record for a brand in the U.S. market, but it's certainly a record for Audi and is a milestone worth noting under any circumstances.

What's more, the Volkswagen-owned brand has kept its win streak alive at a time when the other big luxury players are losing ground. Powered by the Q3, Q5 and Q7 crossovers, Audi is up 3.5 percent in the first half of 2016, while Mercedes, BMW, Lexus, Acura and Cadillac all declined.

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Audi, Acura and Cadillac once formed a closely matched second tier of luxury brands, in terms of sales, after the mighty Mercedes, BMW and Lexus troika. But Audi has passed Acura and Cadillac since 2013 and now makes up the second tier all by itself.

Of course, Audi isn't the only luxury brand having a good year. Among lower-volume marques, Infiniti, Lincoln, Land Rover, Volvo, Porsche, Tesla and Jaguar all have increased sales in 2016.

Luxury outlier

Audi's win streak continued unabated in the 1st half while other top luxury brands slipped.

	JAN.-JUNE 2016	CHANGE FROM JAN.-JUNE 2015
Mercedes-Benz*	162,777	-1.3%
BMW	153,436	-9.0%
Lexus	151,564	-4.6%
Audi	96,934	+3.5%
Acura	78,994	-9.3%
Cadillac	73,231	-9.5%

* Excludes Sprinter and Metris sales.
Source: Automotive News Data Center



The Q5, below, and Q7 have helped power Audi's sales in the U.S.



Infiniti led all brands in a study on prospect satisfaction while Tesla was at the bottom.

Infiniti impresses mystery shoppers

Infiniti stores outperformed all brands in a study on prospect satisfaction, while Tesla lagged all brands.

The 2016 J.D. Power Satisfaction Index is based on the treatment of mystery shoppers who visited 6,157 stores in the U.S. between July 2015 and June 2016.

Lexus and Mercedes-Benz stores tied for second behind Infiniti, followed by Toyota, Audi and BMW.

Porsche, Land Rover and Mitsubishi had the biggest year-over-year improvements. Just two brands, Mtn and Tesla, saw their scores decline from last year.

The lowest-ranked brands, starting from the bottom, were Tesla, Volvo, Mitsubishi, Mazda, Jeep and Chevrolet.

Salesperson behaviors that stood out among brands that rose the most in the rankings over the last 10 years include mentioning the availability of different financing and lease options; asking about reasons preventing purchase; and discussing features that are unique from competitors.

Reasons Tesla scored poorly: It was among the bottom three brands in terms of staffers mentioning financing and leasing options and asking about reasons that were preventing a purchase.

How Americans got to meet the Jeep in 1942

With all the hoopla over Jeep's 75th anniversary this summer, I was reminded that many years ago, my mom found a stack of ancient Reader's Digest magazines at a garage sale and bought them for me.

One article that drew my attention was called "Meet the Jeep," a story condensed from Scientific American that appeared in the January 1942 Digest.

The author, Jo Chamberlin, had written a lively, vintage account of what the Digest called "the homeliest and most useful item in the Army's rolling stock—the midjet combat car."

He described the vehicle's triumphant debut in battlefield maneuvers in Louisiana in 1941. He also went to Camp



RICHARD JOHNSON
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Shelby in Mississippi to check out the "Jeep" for himself. Lt. Patrick Summerour demonstrated "the Army's youngest, smallest, toughest baby" to Chamberlin, beginning by pointing out a towing hook on the back end.

"You pull an anti-tank gun here," he told the writer. "Civilians often ask why we don't fight tanks with tanks. Well, a jeep costs \$900, a tank \$35,000. And these tank-destroyers, towing anti-tank guns, can swarm round enemy tanks and give 'em hell."

Reader's Digest was the best-selling consumer magazine of the day, so you could



say it was Chamberlin who introduced the "Jeep" to the American public.

With great enthusiasm, he wrote: "Tests showed that the jeep could go places a motorcycle couldn't. A single miler can cut down a motorcycle dispatch rider, letting orders fall into enemy hands. A jeep is a tougher proposition, for it carries armed men and machine guns. Besides, it is a climbing, climbing hellion in reaching good places to shoot from."

"The jeep can also be used for reconnaissance and command work. It can serve as a radio patrol car, or to lay a smoke screen to hide the movement of heavy artillery. It can take ammunition, first aid or food to outposts, can evacuate wounded or get a gun crew out of a doomed position. It can cross bridges too weak for heavier cars, can reconnoiter rougher terrain. With a mounted 50-caliber machine gun it can help protect troop columns from airplane strafing."

Reader's Digest printed "Meet the Jeep" in 1942. Jo Chamberlin's lively account of the Army vehicle that was "a climbing, climbing hellion in reaching good places to shoot from."

Summerour took Chamberlin for a spin through rough terrain.

"Ahead of us was a huge live oak with gnarled branches close to the ground. 'Duck!' he yelled. We roared under the lowest branch—the top of our car missing it by inches. We crossed a small stream, water flowing over the floor. But electric units are placed so that the 40-inch-high jeep can keep going through water 18 inches deep. We clawed our way up the 30-degree bank—twice as steep as you'll meet on the road."

When the ride ended, Summerour got out of the bantam car and asked the reporter: "Think we've got something here?"

Chamberlin certainly did. And not just for the battlefield.

"When war ends," the writer predicted, "Jeeps will still be useful."

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the final say ... "Probably faster than what you think."

General Motors President Dan Ammann on the timeline for autonomous vehicles

