

June auto sales expected to be at highest levels since crisis

Automakers will look to cap one of their best six-month sales stretches in recent memory when they report June totals next Tuesday, according to analyst estimates. June sales are expected to be at their highest levels since before the auto crisis, rising 7.6 percent, according to Troy-based market researcher LMC Automotive, and in line with the 7.3 percent industry sales gains through May. Analysts anticipate the annual sales rate will be 15.4 to 15.5 million vehicles. "The industry continues to benefit from modest improvements in housing, unemployment and consumer confidence," said Alec Gutierrez, senior market analyst at Kelley Blue Book, which projects an industrywide sales increase of 6 percent in June. Joe Hinrichs, Ford Motor Co.'s president of American operations, said Thursday that sales in June have been strong, particularly during the first two weeks of the month. Hinrichs said sales slowed in mid-June, in anticipation of Fourth of July and marketing campaigns associated with the holiday. June winners, according to Kelley Blue Book, will be Nissan Motor Co. and Ford, with sales at those automakers expected to rise 14.9 and 13.4 percent, respectively. Ford will benefit from sales of its F-Series pickups and burgeoning lineup of small vehicles, including the Fusion midsize sedan and Escape compact SUV. Nissan is riding a sales wave after lowering the retail price on seven of its models in May. Chrysler Group LLC sales are expected to rise for the 39th consecutive month, rising 7.7 percent, according to KBB. General Motors Co. sales could rise 1.3 percent. Sales of Hyundai Motor America and Kia Motor America products are expected to fall about 3.6 percent. June 2013 has one fewer selling day than June 2012, KBB notes. The Detroit News