

## Light truck sales keep climbing

Sales of light truck models in the U.S. – from pickups to vans – remained strong in February, mirroring an overall continuation of a surge in light vehicle sales this year.

“Despite rising gas prices, severe winter storms and concerns about the federal budget, February was a good indication of the overall strength of the market,” noted Bill Fay, group VP and general manager for Toyota Motor Sales (TMS) U.S.A.

He noted that overall light vehicle sales – both cars and trucks – for TMS increased 4.3% this February compared to the same month in 2012 to 166,377 units. When adjusted for the 24 selling days in February 2013 versus 25 in February 2012, sales were up 8.7% on a daily selling rate (DSR) basis, the OEM said.

Sales of Toyota’s Tacoma pickups topped 12,644 units in February – up 18.5% versus the same month last year – and are 24% higher year-to-date at 24,266 units compared to the same period in 2012. U.S. sales of Toyota’s full-size Tundra pickup reached 7,306 units in February – up 15.5% versus February last year – while year-to-date sales increased to 14,310 units, some 20.9% higher versus the same period in 2012.

Ford Motor Co. said its U.S. sales jumped 9% overall in February to 195,822 units – its best February in six years, with cars up 6%, sport utility vehicle (SUV) sales up 21% and trucks up 4%.

The automaker added that it sold 54,489 F-Series pickups in February, a 15.3% increase over the same month last year, with sales of its Transit Connect van increasing 56.6% to 3,610 units. Year-to-date, sales of the F-Series topped 101,330 units – up 18.1% versus 2012 – with Transit Connect reaching 6,771 units, up 59.1% versus last year.

Ford did note that sales of its E-Series vans – a model due to be discontinued as they will be replaced by the OEM’s full-size Transit van – are starting to decline, falling to 8,336 units this February – a 17.5% drop versus the same month last year – and declining 3.3% year-to-date to 16,323 units compared to 2012.

Ram Trucks – a division of Chrysler – posted another strong month, with February sales of its pickups increasing to 23,289 units – a 3% jump versus the same month last year – while year-to-date sales topped 43,763 units, an 8% increase versus the same period in 2012.

“In spite of a cautious ramp up of some of our most popular products which limited inventory last month, we still managed to record our strongest February sales in five years and our 35th-consecutive month of year-over-year sales growth,” said Reid Bigland, head of U.S. Sales for Chrysler, noting that the OEM posted total vehicle sales of 139,015 units – a 4% increase compared with February 2012 numbers and the

group's best February sales since 2008.

General Motors noted that it sold 224,314 vehicles in the U.S. this February, up 7% compared with the same month last year, with retail sales and fleet sales both up 7%. The fleet mix was 25% of total sales, GM added, equal to a year ago.

"The housing sector has now joined auto sales in propelling the U.S. economy forward," said Kurt McNeil, GM's VP of U.S. sales operations.

"More importantly, the recovery in new home construction is reinforcing the underlying improvement in auto buying conditions, especially for pickups," noting that sales of GM's full-size pickups jumped 28% to 58,039 units compared to the same month in 2012.

"Light vehicle sales have now been running at a mid-15 million unit annual rate since November," he added. "This sets us up well for the launches of key new products this year, including our all-new generation of Chevrolet and GMC full-size pickups."