

Nokian eyes continued N. American growth

SAARISEKA, Finland (March 14, 2013) — Nokian Tyres P.L.C. is targeting double-digit growth in North America this for the third straight year, and management is counting on one new all-weather and two new winter tire products to help dealers expand their sales potential and the company to attract new customers in key areas. That's the message Nokian Tyres North America General Manager Tommi Heinonen conveyed to Tire Business during a four-day tour of Nokian's Finland facilities — including the 1,500-acre Ivalo winter testing grounds near Saariseka — by about 70 U.S. and Canadian dealership representatives. Nokian's sales in North America grew about 12 percent last year to \$142 million, or about 7 percent of global sales. Nokian management sees the market potential for North America as twice that of the Nordic countries, which currently account for about a third of global sales, or roughly \$500 million. The latest product upgrades for North America are two additions to the Hakkapeliitta winter tire family and a new tire in the expanding All Weather Plus product line: Hakkapeliitta R2 and R2 SUV and WR G3 all-season. Nokian gave the invited U.S. and Canadian dealers a full day of hands-on driving at its Ivalo test center, some 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle and a short drive from the Russian border. The Hakkapeliitta R2 and R2 SUV lines incorporate several traction and performance innovations, including the use of as-yet undisclosed "cryo crystals" in the tread compound to enhance ice traction, according to Matti Morri, head of tire technology for the Nokia, Finland-based company. Nokian has applied for patents on the crystal concept, Mr. Morri said. The directional-tread Hakkapeliitta R2 replaces the Hakkapeliitta R in Nokian's lineup. It incorporates several other tread design and compound changes that enhance snow and wet traction, Mr. Morri said, as well as yield a measurable reduction in rolling resistance. The R2 SUV is a more robust version of the R2 featuring different compounds and treads, a two-ply casing, stiffer bead package and a more substantial nylon overlay for enhance load capacity. It also will be offered in nine run-flat sizes. The WRG3 replaces the G2 in Nokian's lineup. It will come in two distinct tread patterns—a directional, symmetric pattern for 14- and 15-inch sizes and an asymmetric pattern for larger sizes. It also incorporates a number of performance enhancements for improved traction in wet, snow and ice as well as reduced rolling resistance and noise. Nokian will start shipping tires this summer in limited sizes and will expand the size range progressively.