

Contact: Nick Cappa
Kristin Starnes

Chrysler Group LLC Modifies Jefferson North Assembly Plant for Production of All-New 2011 Dodge Durango

- Sharing the line with Jeep® Grand Cherokee means production line changes at Jefferson North Assembly Plant
- Work stations lengthened to accommodate longer Durango
- Unique product features require new tools and additional training for employees

November 14, 2010, Auburn Hills, Mich. - Chrysler Group LLC launched production of the all-new 2011 Jeep® Grand Cherokee at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant (JNAP) in May 2010. A little more than six months later and with the addition nearly 1,100 employees on a second shift of production, the plant is adding a second vehicle to the line - the all-new 2011 Dodge Durango.

The nearly 3-million-square-foot assembly plant, one of the last in an urban setting, went through a complete transformation as part of World Class Manufacturing (WCM), an extensive and thorough process to restore all Chrysler Group facilities to their original and maximum functionality, in preparation for the launch of the Grand Cherokee. However, the plant needed to make some additional modifications to the assembly process to accommodate the complexity of the much larger Durango.

Launch of New Dodge Durango Means Changes on the Line

One of the most significant changes that needed to be made to the assembly line for production of the new 2011 Dodge Durango was increasing the length of each work station. Because the new Durango is 10 inches longer than the 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee, each work station needed to be increased from 19 feet to 20 feet. But there wasn't enough floor space to extend the line, so the team at JNAP took advantage of some unused space, compressed some stations and worked on process efficiencies to accommodate the longer Durango in the same footprint.

To ensure that the right vehicle is being built throughout the assembly process, JNAP implemented an automatic vehicle identification (AVI) system as a way to track each model with all of its unique pieces. Should the wrong parts be loaded into the process, the line will stop until the correct parts can be replaced.

Some of the product differences between the Durango and the Grand Cherokee also necessitated additional process changes along the line. One such difference was the number of seats. The Grand Cherokee has two fixed rows of seats, whereas the Durango has three rows. Because the Durango's second row tumbles to allow access to the third row, an additional tool was needed to attach a prop rod to the floor.

Since the third row is completely unique to the Durango, a third installation arm was added to the line to assist with the load in of the seat. The third row also meant the addition of seat belts, duct work for rear air conditioning and other unique parts that required new tools for installation.

Another difference between the Grand Cherokee and the Durango is the rear glass. The Grand Cherokee has flipper glass while the new Durango has stationary glass. This difference required an additional robot in the glass cell to apply the urethane seal around the window opening on the Durango.

The Grand Cherokee comes with a roof rack, but it is optional on the Durango. Because a roof rack is standard on Grand Cherokee, the stamped roof is delivered to the plant with the holes already in it. To reduce the complexity for the Durango, where customers have the option of adding the feature, the roofs arrive at the plant without holes. Robots in the JNAP body shop pierce the 12 holes needed for installation as required.

The new Durango has electro-hydraulic power steering. This unique feature required more line space to

accommodate the new equipment to install the fuel pump tank, while upgrades were made to the fluid fill lines.

The location of the spare tire also meant changes to the line. The spare tire on the Grand Cherokee is located inside the vehicle, whereas it is under the floor pan on the Durango. Because of the unique installation process and location, an additional installation arm was needed in the work station to handle the new Durango.

Before leaving the plant, every vehicle is put through rigorous testing to ensure the highest quality standards are met. In the BSR station - the place on the line where a vehicle is shaken vigorously to detect any buzz, squeaks or rattles - Chrysler engineers needed to redesign the shaker to accommodate the longer length of the Durango. They had to make the posts that pickup the vehicle longer and wider, thereby increasing the landing space for the Durango while not impacting testing for the Grand Cherokee.

Second Shift Starts; More Training to Prepare for Launch

To boost production of the new Durango as well as the Grand Cherokee, a second shift of production - or nearly 1, 100 jobs - was added in July 2010. Each of the new employees participated in at least 32 hours of training, including 10 hours specifically related to WCM, prior to starting work. In total, JNAP has provided employees with nearly 50,000 hours to training in preparation for both launched.

About Jefferson North Assembly Plant

The Jefferson North Assembly Plant was built in 1991 and produced the first Jeep Grand Cherokee in January 1992. In July 1999, the facility was expanded. Production of the 2005 Jeep Grand Cherokee launched in August 2004 and Jeep Commander production launched in July 2005. In May 2010, the all-new 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee rolled off the line. A second shift of production began on July 19, 2010.

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