
Lube Report

GM, Dexron Enjoy Record Sales

BY JOE BEETON (/SDM/JOE-BEETON-2.HTML) • APRIL 29, 2015

STUTTGART, Germany—As General Motors' vehicle sales climb to record volume worldwide, the behemoth automaker reminded automatic transmission fluid suppliers that its trademarked Dexron-VI global specification is more important than ever, and warned that there is no such thing as an ATF that meets "universal" specifications.

Speaking at the Uniti Mineral Oil Technology Congress here on April 15, GM senior lubricant engineer Khaled Zreik noted that 2014 was a record year for the Detroit-headquartered company, having sold 9.9 million vehicles throughout more than 120 countries.

In China, the automaker's largest country market, sales spiked 12 percent from the year before to surpass 3.5 million units. The U.S. market followed at 2.9 million units sold – a 5 percent increase from 2013.

Dexron-VI is the world's most prominent ATF brand, not just in number of licensees but in yearly sales volume as well, according to Zreik. Based on automatic transmission production figures, he added, "almost 11 million gallons of Dexron-VI approved fluids are used around the globe." Of that volume, 47 percent is sold in the United States, 26 percent in Canada, and 21 percent in China.

He emphasized the importance of following original equipment manufacturers' guidelines for service-fill ATF, and warned that end users should be wary of the myriad ATFs in the market that claim to meet universal specifications – such as both GM's Dexron-VI and Ford's Mercon V – as each is different, and such universality is impossible.

Furthermore, Zreik stressed that aftermarket additives cannot convert or "uptreat" one fluid to another. "We always see these kinds of claims, and have tested way too many such products. The results always show that the claims are hilarious."

To compete for ATF factory-fill contracts at GM's 400-plus manufacturing facilities, Zreik reminded suppliers that products must gain its Dexron-VI stamp of approval.

Introduced in 2005, the proprietary Dexron-VI specification requires a minimum drain interval of 150,000 miles for cars and light-duty trucks driven in normal service, which is 50,000 more than GM's previous Dexron-III(H) specification.

And that was not the only upgrade Dexron-VI offered, Zreik emphasized. Dexron-VI fluids improved clutch friction stability, clutch durability and fluid oxidation parameters by 100 percent or more than its predecessor, he noted. The upgrade also required foam-and-aeration and shear stability measurements that are 150 percent and 200 percent better, respectively. Oil film thickness rose 20 percent to deliver significantly better wear protection, Zreik said.

Only licensed products can display the Dexron-VI trademark, and suppliers can earn a license in three ways: as an original formulator with a new blend of base oil, additives and thickeners –which requires passing a comprehensive set of tests at one of two approved independent labs, costing around \$110,000; as a re-blender, which requires permission from the original license holder to blend its formula and a set of key tests that costs around \$40,000; or as a re-brander, which only requires permission from either an original license holder or re-blend license holder to resell its licensed blends under one's own brand. Licensees pay a royalty to General Motors for every gallon of licensed product they sell.

Zreik noted that all candidates for original or re-blend Dexron-VI licensing must be submitted for testing at

Southwest Research Institute or Intertek, which are both based in San Antonio, Texas.

“There has been a great increase in licensing of Dexron-VI,” Zreik said, noting that GM has issued almost 200 individual licenses since 2006. Of the various formulations carrying Dexron-VI approval, Zreik noted that each type of base stock is represented – from API Group I, II and III, to polyalphaolefin-based products.

Meanwhile, more stringent transmission designs have prompted GM to develop an ATF with lower viscosity to boost fuel economy, greater wear control, and improved anti-foam performance and oxidative stability. GM calls this latest specification Dexron HP (for high performance), and says it is intended to go beyond 200,000 miles in its most advanced powertrains, such as the 2015 Hydra-Matic 8L90 eight-speed automatic. So far, only four companies have obtained licenses to supply Dexron HP: Chevron, Shell, SK Lubricants and Valvoline.

GM's portfolio of “Dexron-approved” products extends to high-performance ATFs, dual-clutch transmission fluids, gear oils, hydraulic fluids and automatic transmission seal conditioners. For more information on the Dexron-VI licensing program, go to www.gmpowertrain.com/vehicleengines/dexron-vi.aspx (<http://www.gmpowertrain.com/vehicleengines/dexron-vi.aspx>).