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Chrysler Group to Offer Diesel-powered Jeep® Liberty for North American Market

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The United States could reduce its oil use by approximately 800 million gallons and carbon dioxide emissions by 8 million tons annually, if Americans purchased diesels at the same rate as Europeans, Dieter Zetsche, President and Chief Executive Officer of Chrysler Group, said today. To encourage American acceptance of diesels, Zetsche announced that Chrysler Group will test the North American market with a diesel-powered Jeep® Liberty vehicle beginning in 2004.

At the DaimlerChrysler Innovation Symposium in New York, Zetsche also called on regulators and oil refiners to work together to resolve diesel emissions challenges that will be tested by new tailpipe standards that will go into effect in 2006.

"The best way to show our commitment to work together is to bring a modern, clean diesel passenger vehicle to market, which we intend to do," Zetsche said. "We would like to see the oil refiners commit to producing and distributing high quality, low-sulfur fuel as soon as possible, while the government creates incentives for fuel producers to get clean diesel fuel to the market before the deadline."

While DaimlerChrysler offers a range of diesel-powered passenger vehicles in Europe, where approximately 35 percent of vehicles are powered by diesel engines, the Jeep Liberty will be the first light-duty sport-utility vehicle with a diesel powertrain to go on sale in the United States and Canada.

"Today's modern diesel vehicles should be part of the solution to improving fuel efficiency and reducing carbon dioxide emissions," Zetsche said.

"Diesels lead to up to a 30 percent improvement in fuel economy, while reducing carbon dioxide emissions an average of 20 percent.

"While there are legitimate concerns about the particulate matter and oxides of nitrogen (NOx) exhaust from diesels, the introduction of high quality, low-sulfur diesel fuel will enable a reduction of these emissions," added Zetsche.

Zetsche said that, on average, diesel fuel offered in Europe is six times cleaner than that offered in the U.S., due to a much lower sulfur content extracted during the refining process.

The diesel Jeep Liberty will be powered by a 2.8-liter common rail turbo-diesel engine produced by DaimlerChrysler. It will be available with a manual or automatic transmission, as well as two- or four-wheel drive. It is expected that the diesel-powered Liberty will have up to a 30 percent improvement in fuel economy, versus a comparable gasoline-powered Liberty.

DaimlerChrysler currently offers diesel engines in its Dodge Ram heavy-duty trucks in North America. Approximately 75 percent of all Dodge Ram 2500/3500s sold in North America are powered by diesel engines.

But diesel acceptance as the fuel of choice in high-volume passenger vehicles in North America has been another matter, thanks in large part to some ill-fated attempts in the 1980s to introduce diesels here. "The technology of the time left a bad taste in the mouths of many," Zetsche said, "and a lot of bad memories of smokey, smelly, clattertrap cars.

"But today's clean diesels are surprisingly refined and comparable, category for category, to gasoline-powered vehicles."

Around the world, the Chrysler Group currently offers diesel powertrain options in the Jeep Cherokee (Liberty in North America), Jeep Grand Cherokee, Chrysler PT Cruiser and Chrysler Voyager minivans. In Western Europe, diesel-powered vehicles comprise 56 percent of Chrysler Group's total sales volume.

Jeep Cherokee vehicles with diesel powertrains currently account for 65 percent of that model's total sales in Western Europe.

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