Suppliers on the hunt for engineering talent

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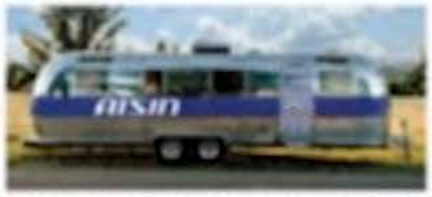
DETROIT — At Motor Bella this week, a silver Airstream trailer emblazoned with the blue and white logo of Aisin will be parked on the field at the M1 Concourse. There are no Aisin transmission or other parts in the aluminum trailer, but the rig is an important component in the Tier 1 supplier's effort to recruit engineers.

It's been about two years since southeastern Michigan-based suppliers have recruited at a big, local event. With the North American International Auto Show canceled twice and SAE International having moved its big Detroit conference online the past two years, automakers and suppliers have been deprived of two of their biggest and best venues to recruit engineers.



Aisin's trailer is part of its recruitment effort.

Motor Bella has attracted about two dozen suppliers as well as every major automaker, and many will use the event to attract potential employees.

The event near Detroit comes at a time when the industry is spending an estimated $300 billion between now and 2026 to develop electric and automated vehicle technology.

A look at the job openings of the major suppliers attending Motor Bella shows hundreds of vacancies, not just in the Detroit area but nationally. Magna International, for example, had 311 engineering job openings listed on its website as of last week.

"Our collaboration with universities is critical to advancing future mobility," said Tracy Fuerst, Magna's vice president of communications. She said recruiters will be at Motor Bella to detail the company's job openings for students and professionals. Magna will display its technologies during the Industry Days event.

In addition, Denso, Bosch and Michelin, along with a number of smaller startup suppliers, will be displaying their wares at Motor Bella and hoping to attract graduating students and experienced engineers.

"In the past we've used SAE, the Detroit show and even CES (the technology expo in Las Vegas) to as an opportunity to reach out and help fill positions and attract new talent," said Joe Bohanynski, Aisin's vice president of corporate communications. "There's a lot of young talent and people with specialties we haven't considered before walking around. We can bring them into our exhibit and talk up our company. We've missed having that opportunity."

Motor Bella is a hands-on event where attendees will be see some of the latest technology suppliers are working on. German supplier Bosch doesn't plan any formal recruiting but said it will be open to talking with job candidates.

"We are looking at it as more of a technical showcase, so certainly we'll be keeping an eye on activities happening there with universities and we are always dialoguing with universities and looking at engineering and other talent," said company spokesman Tim Wieland. "We are always going to be receptive to that." AN

Supplier Lyten will use show to emerge from 'stealth mode'

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For Lyten, a Department of Defense contractor from California, Detroit's Motor Bella will serve as a coming-out party.

The San Jose company has spent the past six years proving its patented 3D Graphene approach to battery architecture for military and aerospace applications. But now, said CEO Dan Cook, the time has come to introduce itself to the auto industry.

"We've been in stealth mode so far," Cook told *Automotive News* on the eve of the outdoor show. "Our plan now is to give full exposure to our technology to the media and to the OEMs. We'll be participating on multiple fronts to explain our value proposition and outlining our plans to industrialize."

Lyten will capitalize on an often overlooked facet of car shows: No longer merely sprawling venues to showcase sparkling new vehicles and tantalizing designs for the future, auto shows have become opportunities for parts suppliers and technology innovators to tell the world that they, too, are part of the equation.


Cook: Battery tech exposure

Perfect timing

The events are not merely about auto reviewers walking the aisles to see what's new nor consumers kicking tires and peering through windows. Shows are also populated with financial players looking for investment opportunities; industry executives scouting their next career moves; and automaker decision-makers and engineers seeking out new parts and technologies.

But there's been a problem lately.

COVID-19 has shut down many major international events since spring 2020. And even before the pandemic, some organizers and supporters were losing their zeal to continue orchestrating the big shows. Motor Bella will take place al fresco at the M1 Concourse in Pontiac, Mich., offering the Detroit industry an event while the long-standing North American International Auto Show is in limbo.

Cook said the opportunity is perfect timing for Lyten. One month ago, the company participated in an aerospace trade show in Colorado Springs, Colo. But Lyten is now actively addressing automakers, he said.

The company will be in validation trials with one automaker during the fourth quarter and in talks with other vehicle producers in North America and Europe.

"Motor Bella provides that nexus point in between where we are in our product development progression, in our customer progression and in our investor progression," he said. "The timing of this event is fortuitous for us."

Preparing for plant

Lyten's business plan is to become an assembler of battery cells based on a lithium-sulfur composition rather than the now-ubiquitous lithium ion. The architecture dispenses with the use of nickel and manganese and uses inert material in its cathodes instead of oxides, which present a safety issue.

The company sees itself at the threshold of a new phase as it enters into a validation cycle that will require about three years of testing. Its timeline will culminate with the launch of mass production around 2025 or 2026.

Cook said Lyten is in discussions with an investment bank — he declined to identify it — to go into a new round of funding to raise capital for a production plant. To date, the company has raised $210 million.

Lyten also has entered into a partnership with a Detroit contractor to construct the plant, he said, but declined to identify the company.

"The OEMs are telling us that there's a real supply challenge facing the industry over the next five to 10 years," said Cook.

"We see an opportunity to enable a competitive U.S. car industry to emerge out of ICE and transitioning into EV.

"When you look at that opportunity, the right first pivot out of military for us is EV." AN

Chip crisis stalls Tesla portfolio expansion

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Tesla Inc. has ambitious plans to continue adding vehicles that upend the status quo and challenge legacy automakers, but it's running into some familiar problems: namely, an inability to deliver on CEO Elon Musk's production promises. Musk has said the ongoing global semiconductor shortage will be a factor in Tesla's ability to produce vehicles through the end of the year and has already delayed plans for the Cybertruck, the next-generation Roadster and a semitruck.

Beyond that, the company continues to toy with the idea of adding some sort of van as well as an inexpensive compact vehicle, but those tenuous plans are subject to change anytime Musk sends off a tweet.

Compact vehicle: Musk first floated the idea of a compact vehicle, priced at less than $25,000, at Tesla's Battery Day event last year. The price point would be achieved by the company's new battery technology, which aims to cut costs. Musk, on a call with Tesla employees, reportedly said the vehicle would launch in 2023. He also suggested it might not even have a steering wheel, echoing previous comments that it would be fully autonomous, although there is no indication the technology necessary for such a move would be ready (or legal) within two years.

Model 3: The vehicle whose launch gave Tesla so much trouble is now one of the company's most important products. All but 1,895 of the automaker's record 201,304 second-quarter global deliveries were either the Model 3 or the Model Y crossover. Tesla has increased Model 3 prices multiple times this year and has made some cosmetic tweaks. The Model 3 is expected to continue in the tradition of other Tesla vehicles and not see a significant redesign in the near future, although the company is expected to continue offering software updates and minor interior design updates.

Model S: The electric sedan, first introduced in 2012, received a major interior update this year with the addition of the Plaid performance variant. The changes include a larger, horizontally oriented touch screen, a revised center console and a controversial U-shaped steering wheel, as well as a new screen for the back seat. The exterior also received minor tweaks. The Model S Plaid can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 1.99 seconds and has an estimated driving range of 396 miles. After promising an even faster, more powerful Plaid+ variant, Musk canceled it, saying the Plaid model was "just so good."

Roadster: Tesla fans who first plunked down thousands of dollars to reserve a next-generation Roadster when it was unveiled in 2017 will have to wait a little longer for what Musk has described as the product portfolio's "dessert." The CEO last month tweeted that the redesign to the company's first high-performance EV has been delayed and will not likely ship until 2023, "assuming 2022 is not mega drama."

Model Y: The launch of Tesla's newest crossover last year was notable for two reasons: It occurred during a pandemic — and it came out ahead of schedule. Musk has said Tesla will soon change the Model Y's production process and use a manufacturing system in which "essentially the rear third of the body is cast as a single piece." The Y is expected to get continued software updates, although no design changes are on the horizon.

The Model Y crossover is expected to get continued software updates.

Model X: Like the Model S, the X received a freshened interior this year and a Plaid performance variant, although this one is behind schedule and has yet to ship. The Model X Plaid boasts a 340-mile range and a 0-to-60 time of 2.5 seconds. Tesla's website says Model X Plaid deliveries are targeted for March to April 2022.

Cybertruck: Musk's wedge-shaped "North American ass-kicker" has been delayed a year because of supply chain shortages pummeling nearly every automaker. The electric pickup was originally scheduled to debut in late 2021, once the company completes the Austin, Texas, factory that will build it. But Musk reportedly delayed the launch to late 2022, with volume production not coming until late 2023.

Musk says the ramp-up will be complicated by the amount of new technology coming to the pickup. Crucially, the delay means Ford Motor Co. will beat the Cybertruck to market with its electric F-150. Once it ramps up, Musk has said, Tesla could build 250,000 to 300,000 Cybertrucks annually.

VW

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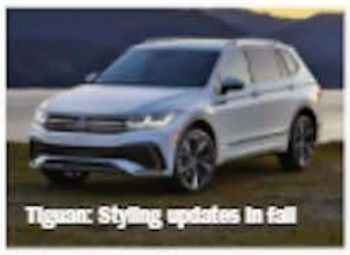
adding more horsepower and getting a new seven-speed automatic transmission. But given the state of sedan sales and coming emissions regulations, it is likely to end its run in 2024.

Taos: The compact crossover, new in 2021, splits the segment with the larger Tiguan and will alternate with it in the product cycle. It will be due for a freshening in 2024.

Tiguan: The freshened compact crossover arrives in the U.S. this fall with extensive styling updates plus an improved infotainment system and safety upgrades aimed at separating it in the segment from the new Taos. It will be due for a redesign in 2024.

Atlas/Atlas Cross Sport: Volkswagen's larger crossover family is due to receive a midcycle freshening, including an all-new interior, in 2023. Though the vehicles remain popular, it is unclear whether they will stick with their current internal combustion powertrain and be redesigned in the later half of the decade or be replaced with electric versions.

ID4: North American production of the battery-powered ID4 compact crossover is to begin in Chattanooga in early 2022, with a reengineered version on sale that year featuring a smaller 62-kilowatt-hour battery pack. It would be due for a freshening in 2025, given the brand's traditional product cycles.



Tiguan: Styling updates in fall

ID Buzz: The retro-styled Microbus is finally due to go on sale in the U.S. in 2023, some five years after the concept was shown, but deliveries likely won't take place until late in the year and could slip into 2024. The ID4 is built in Hamburg, Germany, alongside smaller cargo and passenger versions for Europe. The U.S. version will have a longer wheelbase and a roomier interior.

ID Aero: Volkswagen has promised its dealers a third battery-electric vehicle based on the MEB architecture to go along with the ID4 and ID Buzz, one with better aerodynamics. The timing is still fuzzy, but the ID Aero sedan should be in the U.S. by 2024 and look a lot like an electrified Arteon.

Midsize pickup: VW dealers' desire for a midsize pickup seems to have been quashed by Germany, unless executives can make a business case for a North American-produced electric version built in Chattanooga. While Ford has agreed to make the next-generation VW Amarok pickup, based on the Ford Ranger, its sales will be limited to markets outside the U.S.