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Chrysler LLC Celebrates 25th Anniversary of the Minivan

- Chrysler invented the minivan segment in 1983
- Since then, Chrysler has sold more than 12 million minivans worldwide
- Chrysler and Dodge minivans still command more than 40 percent of the U.S. minivan market
- The Company leads in innovation with more than 65 minivan-first features
- Chrysler minivans are the most awarded with more than 260 accolades

Auburn Hills, Mich. , Sep 25, 2008 - The year was 1983. Ronald Reagan was President of the United States of America. Lech Walesa was the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. The Internet was created, and the first mobile phones were introduced to the public. U.S. astronauts completed the first space shuttle spacewalk; Michael Jackson performed the "moonwalk." The Baltimore Orioles won the World Series...and Chrysler hit a home run with the introduction of the first minivan.

The Chrysler Corporation (as it was known then) was first to market with the minivan in 1983. However, the development of the minivan began even earlier than that, in 1977, as a response to new customer needs identified in the marketplace.

In the late 1970s, U.S. "baby boomers" were starting families in large numbers and were looking for an economical alternative to automotive transportation. Traditional sedans and wagons continued to get smaller due to pollution and fuel economy concerns, and full-sized vans were being customized as passenger vehicles—but the combination of poor ride comfort, large size and rear-wheel-drive design did not make them ideal for family hauling. Chrysler designers and engineers understood the shortcomings of the full-sized van and began early development studies on a vehicle that would fulfill the needs of new families. Chrysler pinpointed a potential vehicle market that needed to deliver a few simple premises: fuel-efficient, easy to step into, family friendly and smaller than the Dodge Ram Van.

After numerous concepts and proposals, Chrysler product planners unanimously agreed on a platform theme that utilized a flat-load floor with the entire powertrain in front of the passenger compartment. Utilizing a front-engine, front-wheel-drive chassis design, Chrysler engineers created a platform with chair-high command-of-the-road seating that provided easy entry and exit. A rear-wheel-drive chassis design would have required a taller floor design, or a center-raised tunnel traveling the length of the vehicle to provide drivetrain clearance. Chrysler engineers also determined that a rear-wheel-drive design would require owners to climb up into the vehicle, rather than conveniently step into it.

With the new family vehicle design theme locked into a front-wheel-drive layout, Chrysler's new "magic wagon" program faced uncertainty with tough U.S. economic conditions. It was not until the federal Chrysler Loan Guarantee Board approved \$1.5 billion (U.S.) for future product programs in 1980 that Chrysler had the funding to move forward.

With new capital to invest, and an economical program budget of \$660 million, all bets were on the production of the magic wagon. The program was a "go," receiving its official internal chassis program designation of "T-115." Chairman Lee A. Iacocca and soon-to-be President Harold "Hal" K. Sperlich quickly led development of the magic wagon—a "mini-van"—along with a revamping of the Windsor Assembly Plant in Ontario, Canada, to produce the upcoming family hauler.

On November 2, 1983, the first minivan rolled down the assembly line in Windsor. These 1984 model-year Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager models quickly appeared in dealerships throughout the U.S. alongside the Dodge Aries and Plymouth Reliant K-cars. Chrysler's limited technical and financial resources forced the Company to focus its marketing and support efforts on K-cars, but Dodge and Plymouth minivans were the products ultimately attracting consumers into dealerships.

The launch of the minivan in 1983 created an all-new product segment. Observed top U.S. automotive magazine Road & Track, "Chrysler is betting there's a big market for a van of this size and is aiming it at current station wagon owners; those who already own larger, less efficient club wagons; growing families; those who need station wagons but hate the stodgy suburban image; women who aren't comfortable driving large conventional vans; people who used to own full-sized sedans and like plenty of interior room, and those who just enjoy the sheer novelty of the vehicle."

The Company's bet was well placed. Chrysler's minivans were an instant success.

As the minivan became a cultural icon throughout North America in the 1980s, its introduction to the international markets helped establish and solidify the Chrysler brand worldwide. It was in 1987 that Chrysler's new minivan, also known as the MPV, or multi-purpose vehicle, began sales in Europe.

Diesel-powered minivans were introduced in 1993, aimed at further strengthening the presence of Chrysler minivans in Europe. In 1996, the Company offered right-hand-drive versions, opening up sales opportunities in markets such as the UK, Japan, Australia and South Africa.

In keeping with the original premise of fuel efficiency, a new world record for fuel economy was set in 2000 by a Chrysler Voyager SE powered by its available 2.5-liter common-rail turbo diesel (CRD) engine. The Voyager traveled 1,724 kilometers (1,077 miles) on a single tank of diesel fuel – a first for a minivan.

The newest fifth-generation minivans—Chrysler Town & Country, Chrysler Grand Voyager and Dodge Grand Caravan—encapsulate more than 65 minivan-first features and more than 25 years of development in minivan leadership. As the leader in family transportation, Chrysler and Dodge minivans take the “family room on wheels” concept to a new level.

The legacy of innovation will continue to be a priority for Chrysler and Dodge minivans going forward. With more than 12 million minivans sold worldwide and over 260 awards—including 2008 “Minivan of the Year” and “International Truck of the Year” by the International Car of the Year organization—Chrysler and Dodge minivans are continuing to make history.

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