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STELLANTIS

This is why Dodge's Hellcats are disappearing and EVs are coming



Breana Noble

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Dodge next week is giving a look at its electrified future — a moment intended to usher in opportunity for improvement in parent company Stellantis NV's ability to meet fuel economy and emissions standards.

The performance brand is celebrating "Speed Week" — what it's dubbed the days between its Roadkill Nights drag racing event on Saturday and the Woodward Dream Cruise — with reveals Monday through Wednesday at Pontiac's M1 Concourse. They honor its current lineup, and Dodge CEO Tim Kuniskis has teased the unveiling of the new plug-in Hornet compact SUV and a concept vehicle of what its electric muscle car will portend in 2024.

The extinction of Dodge's halo Hellcat V-8s is looming next year, and there's a questionable future around the Charger and Challenger muscle cars as they've been known. Their home at Brampton Assembly Plant outside of Toronto is set to be retooled for an electrified platform starting in 2024.

The impetus behind the end of production is the government standards that the automaker — which ranks the worst among major manufacturers for corporate average fuel economy and carbon emissions — has failed to meet without carbon credits. With Dodge home to some of the least environmentally friendly vehicles at the company, experts say electrified offerings are the first step to improve those results. Whether the brand will be able to convert members of the Dodge brotherhood whose sales could make a difference for Stellantis' fleet, however, remains to be seen.

"I honestly don't believe you can use electric and muscle car in the same sentence," said Dale Moews, 51, an information technology professional in southern California's Eastvale who owns a 2021 Challenger SRT Hellcat Redeye. "That's not to say they don't perform. Teslas go

fast as hell. That's not what excites me. It's the roar of the V-8, the exhaust note that screams as you go. (EVs) are entertainless.

"I get 9.6 miles per gallon, because I can't keep my foot off it. It's about smiles per gallon."

The Dodge Challenger and Charger start off with 23 combined mpg with greenhouse gas tailpipe emissions totaling 389 grams per mile, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. It ranks the cars at a five on its emissions scale out of 10, which is the best. Increasing in engine power, the eight-speed automatic Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat Widebody hits 15 mpg and releases 592 grams of emissions per mile, a rank of two.

It's up there, though not the worst offender in Stellantis' 2022 lineup. That would be the V-8-powered Ram 1500 TRX with 12 mpg and 748 grams of emissions per mile. An electric Ram 1500 is coming in 2024.

Research shows trucks and other vehicles with higher emissions see greater improvement from electrification, said Gregory **Keoleian**, director for the Center for Sustainable Systems at the University of Michigan.

"Shifting from a gas-powered muscle car to an electric muscle car will significantly reduce emissions," he said. "The total tons saved will be greater than when replacing a typical sedan with an electric version, because the muscle car is less efficient to begin with. Better for the environment to drive an efficient electric sedan, but buying a BEV muscle car instead of a gas-powered one is still a big improvement."

Between model years 2015 and 2020, Stellantis' fuel economy and carbon emissions actually worsened even with the introduction of the plug-in hybrid version of the Chrysler Pacifica minivan in 2017, according to the EPA. Its average fuel economy dropped to 21.3 mpg from 21.8 mpg compared to the 25.4 mpg 2020 average across manufacturers. The average grams of carbon per mile released by the automaker's vehicles increased to 418 from 409. The industry average for 2020 was 349 grams per mile.

The results heavily depend on the sales volume of Jeep SUVs and Ram trucks that represent a majority of Stellantis' deliveries in the United States. The automaker is aiming for half of U.S. sales to be all-electric by 2030. Dodge represented 12% of transactions last year, and Hellcats are only a fraction of that.

"They have consistently had the lowest corporate average fuel economy for a decade," Sam Abuelsamid, principal e-mobility analyst for market research firm Guidehouse Inc., said of the automaker. "Dodge is extremely reliant on the Hellcat engine in terms of the path to

generating large profits. The Hellcat is a very thirsty engine. If it's using more fuel, it's going to emit more CO₂. That's a major issue for Stellantis."

In the first half of 2022, Stellantis took a \$711 million charge in the United States for incompliance after the implementation of higher penalties that had been rolled back during the Trump administration.

"Against a backdrop of unprecedented regulatory challenges," Stellantis spokesman Eric Mayne said in a statement, "we are focused on compliance, evidenced by our \$35-billion investment in vehicle electrification and related software and our commitment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2038."

The EPA's next Automotive Trends Report will include the 2021 model year when Jeep introduced the plug-in hybrid Wrangler 4xe, now the country's most popular PHEV, according to the company. It offers nearly double the fuel economy and releases almost half of the tailpipe emissions of the EcoDiesel Wrangler. Jeep this year also has made available a 4xe version of the two-row Grand Cherokee SUV.

"Corporate average fuel economy is not broken down by brand or model," Mayne said. "We have previously demonstrated improvement as we continued to deliver vehicles that resonate with the wide-ranging preferences of the driving public. Future electrified offerings will compound our gains."

Jeep's open-air and adventure-focused branding, however, jives with the image of electrification. Dodge's image of skid marks, burnouts and revving engines doesn't, many fans argue.

"Electric and muscle cars don't go together," said Steven Smith, 65, of Marlborough, New Hampshire. "They're going to lose a lot of loyal Dodge customers."

Smith says he's won't buy an electric car. He just got his hands on a 2022 Challenger Hellcat Redeye Super Stock, which were made in limited production: "It's more for an investment. I know what's going to happen. Next year is the last year they're producing the Hellcat engine. They're going to go up in value, especially for certain ones."

For the 2021 model year, Dodge offered a Durango SRT Hellcat. The vehicle was available with limited production, though, because of evaporative emission regulations.

Kuniskis has been vocal about wanting to avoid another 1972 — when muscle cars began disappearing because of the oil crisis. He's previously emphasized how EVs present new

flexibility in vehicle execution.

"Performance and the attitude and the personality of performance is not going to go away," Kuniskis told The Detroit News in November. "It's just going to be different. Electrification opens up lots of opportunities for increased performance. You see some people today doing over-the-air updates on electrification for increased performance and features and benefits and things like that. It opens the door very wide."

EVs like the Tesla Model S Plaid that accelerates from 0 to 60 mph in 2 seconds already have shown to be faster than their internal combustion engine counterparts. Horsepower is in Dodge's DNA, but it still will have to separate itself enough not to get lost in the competition, Abuelsamid said.

"They'll have to find some other way to differentiate in the way they look, the way they drive overall or other aspects of user experience," he said. "There are other ways to differentiate besides quarter-mile times that are better than they ever have been."

For some fans, though, that acceleration is what excites them about EVs: "It's more like a computer on wheels," said Firas AlMukdad, 28, CEO of Customs by Ali, an aftersales shop focused on Teslas and Hellcats in Elyria, Ohio, outside of Cleveland. "The performance side of things, it's there. An all-wheel drive version would be a game-changer for them."

Still, he notes, "Nothing gives like a supercharger V-8 whine."

bnoble@detroitnews.com

Twitter: @BreanaCNoble