



By Michael J. McDermott
Photographs by Jonathan Wayne



UP FOR THE *task*

Lordstown workers are
excited to build the
next generation of small cars

General Motors' decision to build a manufacturing complex in Lordstown, Ohio, in the mid-1960s sparked an economic upturn for the entire Mahoning Valley. Over the next four decades, the region, located in the northeastern part of the state, lost thousands of steel industry jobs, but the Lordstown facility remained an economic anchor. Today, thanks to GM's commitment to invest upward of \$500 million in the Lordstown Assembly Plant and Metal Center to build its new Delta small-car platform, the future of the area — and the livelihood of thousands of

INVESTING IN LORDSTOWN: UAW Local 1112 member Dean McConnell (left) works second shift in Chassis 3.



THE NEXT GENERATION: At left, Steve Kozub ties a steering column down in Trim 5; opposite page, lower left, Dean McConnell poses with the Pontiac Sunfire.

UAW members — has taken a decided turn for the better.

“There couldn’t be any more important decision to the future of our members,” says John Mohan, shop chairman of UAW Local 1112 at the Lordstown Assembly Plant. “We were scheduled to close in 2004, and without a new product announcement here our members would have been looking for employment. This is as important for the entire three-county Mahoning Valley area as it is for our membership. Lordstown is the major employer in the valley, and its closing would have been a huge loss.”

Bob Chambers, president of UAW Local 1714 at the Lordstown Metal Center, agrees: “Lordstown’s selection to build the new Delta car platform is critically important to the entire Mahoning Valley community. The economy has been tough here; there’s been a real drain of jobs. This decision is paramount to both our membership and the valley.”

The company’s decision to stake its future in the vital small-car segment on a 36-year-old plant is noteworthy, to say the

least. Major renovations to bring Lordstown up to speed for the start of production in late 2004 underscore GM’s commitment. Chief among them are reconfiguring and retooling the general assembly plant, retooling the body shop, constructing a state-of-the-art paint shop and refurbishing the metal stamping facility.

UAW Local 1112 member Amos Thomas, who has spent his entire 36-year career as an autoworker at Lordstown, says the mood at the plant since the August announcement has been noticeably upbeat. “People are excited about this news,” says Thomas, who works first shift in the Final Process Department. “We have a great workforce here. We have done things that have never been done before or since, and we’ve made multiple models of cars. I believe that was a big factor in GM’s decision to invest here.”

Given Lordstown’s importance to the local economy, efforts to secure the Delta contract came from many quarters. The state of Ohio, for example, offered a number of incentives, including a 7.5 percent investment tax credit for manufacturing machinery and equipment that could be worth up to \$37 million, as well as a \$20 million business development grant for on-site infrastructure assistance.

But as far as UAW Local 1112 member Sheryll Giddens is concerned, GM’s investment in Lordstown is a direct reflec-

tion of the proud labor force at the complex. “We are willing to do whatever it takes to make a world-class vehicle,” says Giddens, who works first shift in the Paint Department at the assembly plant. “I feel personally invested in every car that comes off that line, and I think I speak for my UAW brothers and sisters when I say that.”

As Lordstown prepares to produce the next generation of small cars for General Motors, it is being asked to do something that no other plant has ever done. “Over the next two years, we are going to engineer the greatest conversion of a brownfield plant to a leanfield plant ever attempted,” says Plant Manager Maureen Midgley. “We are going to do it without missing a beat. We’ll never shut down.”

The facility, which turned out almost 324,000 Chevrolet Cavaliers and Pontiac Sunfires in 2001, will continue to build those cars even as it undergoes a



MOVING AHEAD: Above, Tom DiCintio and Michelle Colyar hook up the vent hose, route the heater control and set the dome light switch in place.

petitive — and that we can accommodate the company in the New World marketplace.”

For UAW Local 1112 member Tim Cubellis, who works first shift in the General Assembly Department, the Delta announcement also means an increased sense of security. He hopes to not only retire from the plant, where he has worked for the past quarter century, but also put his kids through college and tend to other important matters in his life. “We had been thinking about refinancing our mortgage and doing some things around the house, but we were hesitant,” he relates. “Now we’re moving ahead with everything.”

“What’s also important is that there will be jobs for people here in the future,” he adds. “No doubt, we are up to the task put before us. We are going to build the next generation of GM small cars, and we are going to do it right.” ■

what they’re saying

“THIS SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN GM’S LORDSTOWN Assembly Plant and the metal stamping facility provides job security for loyal, hard-working UAW members for years to come.” — *Richard Shoemaker, vice president and director of the UAW General Motors Department*

“GM’s investment in Lordstown signifies that GM will continue to aggressively compete in the very important small-car segment. GM’s next generation of small cars is being developed with world-class quality, exciting styling and great value for customers.”

— *Gary Cowger, president of GM North America*

“This important commitment to UAW members in Local 1112 at the Lordstown Assembly Plant and UAW Local 1714 members at the Lordstown metal stamping facility also contributes to economic stability in the Mahoning Valley region and the state of Ohio.”

— *Lloyd Mahaffey, UAW Region 2B director*



conversion to prepare for the Delta platform. “This is one of the most aggressive plans ever attempted in the automotive business,” Mohan acknowledges. “We won’t lose any product at all during the changeover.”

If the level of confidence evident among Lordstown’s UAW-represented members is any indication, the Lordstown workforce is up to the challenge. “The UAW members around here have proven they can build a quality product,” says UAW Local 1714 member Berny Caro, a tradesman pipefitter at the Metal Center. “We’re proving that we can be flexible and com-

an industry leader

THE GENERAL MOTORS LORDSTOWN COMPLEX HAS BEEN rolling new General Motors cars off its assembly lines since the mid-1960s. Currently, the Lordstown Assembly Plant builds Chevrolet Cavaliers and Pontiac Sunfires, both of which are scheduled to be discontinued for the 2004 model year. There are about 4,500 UAW-represented and salaried GM employees at the plant, and they produce about 350,000 cars a year. The adjacent Metal Center employs 2,360 UAW-represented workers and 230 salaried employees.