

## 8 GM Brands: 1 or 2 Too Many?

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Lots of folks are speculating about GM's future. If you take all the press reports at heart, you would think that General Motors is on life support. Quite frankly, the opposite is true especially when you look at the global picture. In 2005, "the General" sold more than 9 million cars worldwide, the first time the automaker reached that figure since 1978. Yes, U.S. auto sales are down and some are calling for GM to reduce its many brands, currently numbering 8. Who should GM let go? Or, should General Motors stick with the game plan and maintain all 8 brands?

For the record, GM's 8 brands are: Cadillac, Buick, Pontiac, Chevrolet, Saturn, GMC, Hummer, and Saab. You could take Saab out of that pack as the Swedish automaker (although fully owned by GM) builds few cars in North America. Still, GM includes Saab in its marketing schema so we'll keep them in for argument's sake.

Clearly, Cadillac is GM's luxury division; Chevrolet is its budget or "All American" division; while GMC is the truck division. Beyond that, there is much muddling of divisions, but Buick is a maker of "near luxury" vehicles (Cadillac lite) while Hummer is GM's specialty truck division. The Saab line is a bit confusing as it once was a true European division. Now, the make is chiefly featuring rebadged GM and Subaru vehicles with little original models to show for it. Finally, Pontiac and Saturn duplicate much of what the other divisions do, although the Saturn mystique of "no haggle pricing" gives the make a certain aura to it. That leaves Pontiac.

Pontiac, like the recently killed off Oldsmobile name, is probably one of the most vulnerable of the true "American" makes. Saturn will survive because its dealer network is tops and consumer satisfaction ranks up there with Lexus.

Ultimately, the Saab name will likely die first. Outside of the U.S., particularly in Europe, Opel is a known name and an important GM make. Word has it that some of Saab's production will shift to Germany and certain rebadged Opels will begin to sport the Saab name. Let's just say once that happens, there is little reason to continue making Saabs. Let the Saab name die with dignity. Why spoil it by selling rebadged Opels as Saabs?

Personally, I think GM should leave well enough alone with its remaining American brands. I wasn't in favor of Oldsmobile's demise and I am not in favor of killing off trusted brands. GM is retooling its operation as old models are killed off and as new or revived models step in. Look for the **Chevy** Camaro, **Pontiac** Firebird, **Saturn** Sky, and the **Buick** Enclave to help spark their respective divisions to renewed glory. Am I living a pipe dream? Maybe, but at least my imagination is going in a positive direction. **Copyright 2006** – For additional information regarding **Matt Keegan**, The Article Writer, please visit his blog for wit, quips, and freelance writing tips.