

# CAW Hopes Fiat Brings Lancia To Canada

Manufacturing.net

TORONTO (CP) -- Chrysler's Canadian workers haven't received official word that they'll be building Fiat's Lancia-brand luxury vehicles, but a union leader says it would be "perfect" for the company's Brampton, Ont., plant.

Industry research firm AutomotiveCompass has said it believes Chrysler will begin building Lancias in Brampton beginning in 2012.

"If it happens, that would be perfect. I know it's just a matter of time," said Leon Rideout, local president for the Canadian Auto Workers in Brampton, northwest of Toronto.

CAW president Ken Lewenza said nothing has been confirmed, but he is "anticipating good news."

Although the output of Lancias is expected to be small -- between 10,000 and 15,000, or less than five percent of the plant's capacity -- Lewenza said any increase in production is good news.

"Any major manufacturing facility today can't rely solely on a high-volume vehicle," he said.

Even a model that may require the manufacture of only several thousand vehicles a year can still represent a week's production at an assembly plant.

"So any time you can increase the build and add flexibility, that's important, no question about it," Lewenza said. "That's where the industry's heading. The plants that don't have the ability to manufacture multiple vehicles, whether it's by large volumes or smaller volumes, won't be around."

Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne, who took the reins at Chrysler last year after the Italian automaker took a controlling stake in the struggling automaker, is notoriously secretive about his product plans, Rideout said.

"Marchionne drives us all nuts because he keeps his cards close to his chest and he just doesn't let it out there," he said.

"But I've got a feeling, long term, they're going to put some Fiat product in Brampton assembly."

AutomotiveCompass forecaster Doug Shepard said the firm put two and two together from speeches Marchionne has given to both Chrysler and Fiat audiences, including a reference to a "Lancia 300C."

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This implies the vehicle would be based on Chrysler's 300C full-sized sedan, which is currently built in Brampton.

Chrysler spokeswoman Mary Gauthier said the company doesn't discuss future product plans.

Because the volume of vehicles produced is expected to be so small, it's unlikely it will result in any additional jobs.

"It's not going to make it or break it for Chrysler or Fiat or for the (Brampton) plant either way, but I guess the best analogy is the Lancia version of the 300C at (Brampton) is the icing on the cake," Shepard said late Wednesday.

"It's a measure of security at the very least for existing workers, and possibly an opportunity for a little overtime as well."

Marchionne has said he's weighing whether to manufacture Alfa Romeo-brand vehicles in Brampton, which currently builds the 300C, Dodge Challenger and Dodge Charger. The plant is running on two shifts and has about 800 workers on layoff.

Fiat took a controlling stake in Chrysler last year while the struggling company was under bankruptcy protection in the United States.

The agreement aimed to provide Chrysler with the small vehicle technology it lacked, while Fiat would get access to the North American marketplace through Chrysler's distribution system.

In April, Marchionne said he hoped that the combined Chrysler-Fiat would build six million cars annually by 2014 with revenues of US\$86.3 billion.

Chrysler Canada employs approximately 7,500 people at assembly plants in Brampton and Windsor, Ont., and a small casting plant in Toronto.

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