

How GM's Dauch Became No. 1 At Chevy Spring Plant

By FRED DeLANO

When Chevrolet recently announced appointment of Richard E. Dauch as manager of the division's spring and bumper plant in Livonia, it was done with typical corporate formality.

However, between the lines of a news release prepared in accordance with a tried and true, colorless General Motors format, lay intimations that Dick Dauch is an unusual man.

An interviewer comes away from the giant plant on Eckles Road convinced Dauch is all that and more.

The mere fact that he won't reach his 31st birthday until July 22, yet already has been entrusted with the No. 1 post at a key facility in Chevrolet's far-flung operations, attests that this is more than just another young man in a hurry. The job he holds isn't for mental lightweights.

There is a conviction that Dauch is a name the entire motor industry should mark well in its future book for possible listing at the corporate pinnacle.

For the nonce, however, his dedication is entirely to the new task at hand — one that is wrapped in thousands upon thousands of bumpers and coil and leaf springs.

The trip 6-3, 220-pound ex-footballer from Purdue University knows as well as any of the 1,600 employees under his command that the past growth and success of this important cog in the GM scheme of things wasn't his doing.

But he also realizes more keenly than any of those 3,600 that the continued growth and success of this plant in a highly competitive field is his baby for the immediate future.

Standing on a ledge behind Dauch's desk is a framed copy of an essay, "What It Takes To Be No. 1," written by the late Vince Lombardi, who carved his own niche at football's pinnacle as one of the pro game's most successful coaches.

There is an unspoken significance to its prominent place among artifacts deemed worthy of inclusion in an office where production charts and blueprints of expansion dominate.

When Dauch's predecessor, Walter O. Muller, was tapped a short time ago to become manager of Chevrolet's Detroit gear and axle plant, Chevrolet Manufacturing Manager James W. McLernon plucked Dauch from Flint at one of the Livonia plant's pivotal moments.

Well under way is a physical expansion program which will add thousands of square feet to production facilities as well as lead to a substantial increase in the number of employees.



DICK DAUCH, new manager of Chevrolet's spring and bumper plant in Livonia, shows a poster montage created by former colleagues at the Chevrolet assembly plant in Flint. It depicts highlights of his career and now hangs prominently in his new office. (Observer photo)

Too, this summer sees the Eckles Road facility under extreme pressure of having to juggle production schedules while making major changes in eight of the 13 press lines before starting work on 1974 model components.

What Dauch refers to as the government's "first time demands" concerning barrier impact standards for bumpers made it necessary to accelerate 73 model bumper production while still mapping the plans for back-to-back model change-over production requirements.

Succinctly, Dauch states: "This plant has a mission to accomplish and whether we accomplish it depends on how we all perform — all 3,600 of us."

He is quick to point out that, although General Motors is the plant's parent and chief customer, "this is not a monopoly and we must remain competitive in our prices to match the market."

Whence did this young man spring?

It is not unlikely that some biographers would label Dauch the ideal "all-American boy" type. There are chapters in his background — such as having been the high school football captain who married the cheerleader — which lean that direction.

There are others who might say this product of an Ohio farm near Ashland took dead aim on a target and that year by year he has moved closer to the bull's eye.

bly plant at Flint as a college graduate-in-training. Some where along the line he had a chance to decide whether to go into assembly of passenger cars or trucks and he chose the latter.

"As a farm boy, I was close to trucks," he recalls now. "And when you work with trucks you learn to work with all types of people and to learn schedules. That's really what this business is all about — to run by schedule."

Statistics on the importance of truck transportation in the U.S. economy have soared in recent years on a course almost parallel to Dauch's own executive ascendancy and to the boom that has hit Chevrolet's spring and bumper.

"The rapid development of recreational vehicles has played a big part in bringing about the skyrocketing demand for this plant's products. With that, the commercial truck market has come along fast," says Dauch.

Just how fast is emphasized in the latest edition of Motor Truck Facts, which points out that all previous production and sales records for the truck and bus portion of the automotive industry were broken last year.

Each month, January through December, a new monthly high was set with total sales reaching more than 2.4 million for the year.

The publication notes that much of the increase was spurred by the growing popularity of light trucks for personal transportation and recreation. Nearly 10 million U.S. households now own

light trucks, many as the sole means of motor vehicle transportation.

Dauch became a foreman at the Flint assembly plant in 1955, general foreman in 1957, superintendent for truck production in 1968, superintendent of inspection early in 1971 and general superintendent of plant production in July the same year.

When Dauch graduated from Ashland High School and enrolled at Purdue, it was with the reputation as a top athlete in all sports. He became the Bollermakers' starting fullback on teams which posted 6-3, 4-4 and 5-4 records in '51, '52 and '53 respectively.

"I had hoped for a career in pro football and was drafted by the Los Angeles Rams," he remembers. "However, a knee injury knocked that out. I knew I couldn't meet the Rams' standards, and it turned out that I got started in this business the same time as the truck market."

"The answer to all problems is people," he said during a daily walk-through of the plant he now directs. "It means getting the right person for the right job."

The youngest plant manager in Livonia spring and bumper plant's history could have added that if the shoe fits, put it on.

Although he has done just that, he didn't say it — and for the information of high school coaches in the area, the house-hunting Dauch family includes an 11-year-old lad from the same mold as his pop.



MAJOR CHANGES in production lines have been brought on in the spring and bumper plant by new government regulations. Dauch (left) checks items with Charles Stahl (center), plant engineering superintendent, and Marvin McCadden, personnel director. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring).

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