1996 – 2005: A decade dominated by mega

1996

Michelin North America CEO Carlos Ghosn joins Renault as an executive vice president.

1997

Mercedes-Benz Chairman Jürgen Schrempp ousts Mercedes Chairman Helmut Werner.

1998

VW outbids BMW for Rolls-Royce, but BMW gets Rolls-Royce name. BMW head Bernd Puches and (left) and VW group boss Ferdinand Pech (right) decide BMW will keep Rolls and VW will keep Bentley.

1999

BMW CEO Bernd Puches and (middle) resigns. BMW product development chief Wolfgang Reitzle (right) resigns after he is passed over for Puches and VW's Ferdinand Puch hares Bernd Puches and (right) becomes the VW board member in charge of quality control and chairman of Seat.

2000

GM spins off Delphi.

Suppliers react with caution to online purchasing portal (later named Covisint) formed by Ford, GM and DaimlerChrysler.

Ford beats GM to acquire Land Rover from BMW. Land Rover becomes part of PAG.

GM acquires 20% stake in Fiat.

Ford introduces the Ka, the first car to feature its new-edge design.

Fiat launches the Palio world car.

PSA introduces its first issue on February 9, 1996.

France’s Valeo buys US supplier Visteon, the world’s largest automotive parts supplier.

Valeo CEO Jacques Caeur (left) announces he will retire. Jean-Martin Folz (right) will be his successor.

Mercedes A class rolls over during a test drive by a journalist in Sweden. Problem is solved by addition of Bosch’s Electronic Stability Control. Similar anti-roll-over technologies soon grow in popularity.

Automakers adopt voluntary CO2 emission targets.

New-car diesel sales account for 33% of the market in 2000, up from 56% the previous year because of the introduction of common-rail diesels. Diesel account for half of all new-car sales by the end of 2005.

PSA CEO Jacques Caeur (left) watches Nissan CEO Yoshikazu Hamann sign a deal that gives Renault a controlling share of the Japanese carmaker. Renault sends Carlos Ghosn to Tokyo to rescue Nissan.

Renault buys 51% stake in Dacia. Renault raises stake to 99% in 2003.

DaimlerChrysler takes controlling stake in Mitsubishi and 10% stake in Hyundai.

Smart microcar brand launched by DaimlerChrysler, which also takes full control of Smart, buying Swatch-maker SMH Group’s remaining 19%.

Vickers puts Rolls-Royce and Bentley up for sale.

Volkswagen purchasing chief Jose Ignacio Lopez resigns November 29. GM, his former employer, takes him to court claiming he stole crucial documents and took them to VW GM and VW strike a deal to settle the dispute in 1997.

BMW announces it is part of a group in Brazil.

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Bosch passes Visteon to become No. 2 supplier in sales.

Former BMW executive Carl-Peter Forster is named chairman of GM's German subsidiary Opel. In 2006, he is promoted to the top job at GM Europe.


Ford plans to base Volvo and Mazda models on its C1 architecture that also is used for the Ford Focus.

Suzuki says it will triple the size of its Estéigrom, Hungary, plant to 270,000 by 2006 to build cars for itself and Fiat Auto including the Fiat Sedici SUV (above).

Audi won't replace the all-aluminum A2 at the end of its life cycle in 2005. It is a sign that automaker enthusiasm for aluminum cars is waning.

London begins collecting a congestion charge from cars entering the city center.

Porsche becomes the VW group's largest single shareholder.

Carlos Ghosn is named CEO of Renault. He remains CEO of Renault alliance partner Nissan.

General Motors pays Fiat €1.55 billion to end their alliance.

DaimlerChrysler announces Chrysler CEO Dieter Zetsche will replace Jürgen Schrempp as DaimlerChrysler chairman on January 1, 2006. This causes Mercedes Car Group CEO Eckhard Cordes to resign. Zetsche takes on Cordes’ job.

DaimlerChrysler reduces stake in Mitsubishi and sells stake in Hyundai.

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SAIC buys the intellectual property rights to the Rover 25 and Rover 75 sedans plus several MG Rover engine families.

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