

BUSINESS

high auto prices may drop, but not dramatically: Honda exec

Honda expects its factories to make more vehicles this year despite a computer chip shortage and supply chain troubles. But because it's starting the year with so few vehicles at dealers, the company expects US sales to fall below last year's numbers.

The company expects US new vehicle prices to ease a bit from the record of more than \$46,000 in December as automakers increase production, but Executive Vice President of National Operations Dave Gardner said prices won't fall to where they were before the pandemic.

A shortage of new vehicles brought on by

the global chip shortage has forced Honda and other automakers to cut factory production at a time when demand is strong. That has crimped the supply of new vehicles, in some cases driving prices higher than the window sticker.

Honda, with its Acura luxury brand, expects to sell somewhere around 1.4 million vehicles in the US this year, which would be short of last year's 1.47 million. Last year, the automaker started with 300,000 vehicles in its US inventory. Today it has only about 20,000, Gardner said.

"I think we're expecting that we're going to be able to build more than we were last year,

but the pipeline has been emptied to such a degree," he told reporters Wednesday.

Edmunds Executive Analyst Jessica Caldwell says Honda's situation is typical of the rest of the US industry. She expects production increases, but says automakers have 75% fewer vehicles on dealer lots than in a normal year. And many of those already have been sold.

As a result, people currently are paying an average of \$700 over the sticker price for an average of \$46,426. "I think that average that we're seeing is probably going to come down," she said. (AP)



A 2021 Pilot sports-utility vehicle is flanked by a 2021 CR-V as they sit on the otherwise empty apron in front of the showroom of a Honda dealership Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021, in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. (AP)

The future of the 'Point of Sale' is here

Visa Inc pioneers cloud-based payment acceptance platform

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 13. (Agencies): Visa announced a new platform, Visa Acceptance Cloud (VAC), set to revolutionize the way businesses accept payments from their customers. Following the success of the company's popular "Tap to Phone" solution, VAC will let acquirers, payment service providers, point of sale (POS) manufacturers, and Internet of Things (IoT) players move payment processing software from being embedded in each hardware device to being universally accessible in the cloud.

Already live across six geographies, VAC will help innovators transform almost any device into a cloud-connected payment terminal, while providing seamless, cloud-based software updates, robust analytics, and network services from Visa. Since VAC runs on Visa's data centers, it also offers leading data security capabilities.

"Cloud acceptance is the future of payments," said Mary Kay Bowman, senior vice president and global head of payment and platform products, Visa. "Cloud-connected POS lets sellers accept payments across a range of devices quickly, simply, and safely, whether at an unattended kiosk in a hotel, a mirror in a high-end retail store or virtual in-home gym, or a smart phone in the hands of a small seller with a roadside newsstand."

In January 2020, Visa first showcased the power of "Tap to Phone," an industry-first solution that transforms current generation Android smartphones and tablets into contactless point of sale terminals. Tap to Phone was Visa's first offering that let sellers accept payments on the devices they already own, just by downloading an app. As of December 2021, there were more than 300,000 devices across 54 countries using Tap to Phone.

Expanding beyond phones, Visa Acceptance Cloud enables any POS or connected device to seamlessly accept payments and to incorporate a range of added services, including buy now, pay later, fraud management, Rapid Seller Onboarding, and advanced data analytics. The ongoing pilots in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia cater to a variety of use cases, including retailers and restaurants in Australia through Visa's work with U.S.-based fintech, Bleu, NOBAL Technologies' smart mirror and public trains in Brazil.

"Bleu is working with Visa to bring seamless payments to businesses across Australia for the very first time," said Sesie Bonsi, President & CEO, Bleu.



In this file photo, Visa CEO Al Kelly speaks on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Visa announced a new platform, Visa Acceptance Cloud (VAC), set to revolutionize the way businesses accept payments from their customers. (AP)

"While the average business owner can spend as much as \$1,000 on POS devices, plus countless hours and more money on time consuming certification processes, moving to Visa Acceptance Cloud removes the barriers of traditional hardware and burdens of device-bound kernel certifications, making it easier for the independent business that we serve to deliver touchless payment options to their customers through any connected device."

"Retailers are looking to enhance their in-store customer experience to meet the speed and convenience of the online and in-store checkout experiences," says Bill Roberts, CEO, NOBAL Technologies. "NOBAL's intelligent mirror in partnership with VAC from Visa provides payment experiences on our mirror without the expense and expertise required for embedded hardware modules, helping us push the future of retail in new ways."

"VAC is a universal platform that helps open up acceptance for all - by freeing our leading technology partners to innovate. On one end of the spectrum, cloud acceptance helps drive inclusion for more small sellers who want to offer digital payments. On the other end, Visa Acceptance Cloud enables advanced shopping and buying experiences that will be central to the future of retail for businesses of all shapes and sizes," continued Bowman. "Moving acceptance to the cloud opens up the possibility of so much innovation from the entire payments ecosystem. This is only the beginning."

Visa is a world leader in digital payments, facilitating more than 215 billion payments transactions between consumers, merchants, financial institutions and government entities across more than 200 countries and territories each year.

Stocks wobble as investors monitor inflation, earnings

Asian shares retreat as inflation augurs Fed rate hikes

NEW YORK, Jan 13, (AP): Stocks wobbled lower on Wall Street Thursday afternoon as investors gauged the latest data on inflation and company earnings.

The S&P 500 fell 0.6% as of 12:18 pm Eastern. The benchmark index is coming off two days of gains following daily losses since the first day of trading in 2022.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 16 points, or 0.1%, to 36,311 and the Nasdaq fell 1.3%.

Industrial companies made solid gains. Delta Air Lines jumped 3.2% after reporting surprisingly good fourth-quarter financial results.

Banks also gained ground. Major banks, including Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo, will report their latest financial results on Friday.

Big technology stocks, which have an outsized influence on the S&P 500 because of their high valuations, fell and checked gains elsewhere in the market. The sector has been slipping in January as investors shift money in anticipation of rising interest rates, which tend to make pricey tech stocks less attractive.

Chipmaker Nvidia fell 4.2% and software maker Adobe fell 2.9%.

"It is a little bit of a confusing narrative for the first two weeks of this year," said Scott Ladner, chief investment officer at Horizon Investments. "The market is really coming to grips with selling really highly valued, profitless tech names and finding other places to put money."

Many of the big tech companies with solid revenue and profits, such as Apple and Microsoft, will suffer less than their counterparts that have little revenue, but rosy projections, he said.

Health care stocks also fell. Pfizer shed 1.7%.

Bond yields were stable. The yield on the 10-year Treasury remained at 1.73% from late Wednesday.

Inflation has been a key focus for investors as they try to gauge how rising prices will impact businesses, consum-



A currency trader walks by screens showing the Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) and the foreign exchange rate between US dollar and South Korean won (right), at the foreign exchange dealing room of the KEB Hana Bank headquarters in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Jan. 13, 2022. Shares were mostly lower in Asia on Wednesday after the latest report of surging prices in the US appeared to keep the Federal Reserve on track to raise interest rates in coming months. (AP)

ers and the Federal Reserve's policy on interest rates in 2022.

The Labor Department on Thursday reported that prices at the wholesale level surged by a record 9.7% for all of 2021, setting an annual record and providing further evidence that inflation is still present at all levels of the US economy. The report follows Wednesday's release of consumer price data for December, which showed that inflation jumped at its fastest pace in nearly 40 years last month.

Investors are also monitoring how the latest wave of COVID-19 cases affects the global economy. In Asia, the omicron variant has swept across Australia and is gaining ground in other countries despite high vaccination rates, mask requirements and strict border policies.

Japan reported more than 13,000 new infections on Wednesday, the highest

level in four months. China, whose zero-COVID policies are being challenged by outbreaks just weeks ahead of the Beijing Winter Games, is testing and in some cases locking down entire cities.

Markets in Asia and Europe were mixed.

Shares were mostly lower in Asia on Thursday after the latest report of surging prices in the U.S. appeared to keep the Federal Reserve on track to raise interest rates in coming months.

London, Paris, Tokyo and Shanghai were lower while Sydney and Hong Kong advanced.

Surging coronavirus cases have been raising uncertainty about the pace of recovery from the pandemic.

Britain and Germany have endured severe waves of the highly contagious omicron variant of coronavirus. France is at the epicenter of Europe's current

fight against COVID-19, with new infections topping 360,000 a day in recent days.

Germany's DAX fell 0.2% to 15,973.58 while the CAC 40 in Paris sank 0.6% to 7,196.23. In Britain, the FTSE 100 lost 0.3% to 7,533.13. On Wall Street, the futures for the S&P 500 and for the Dow industrials were down less than 0.1%.

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30-year rate now at 3.45%

US long-term mortgage rates jump

SILVER SPRING, Maryland, Jan 13, (AP): Average long-term U.S. mortgage rates jumped again this past week, reaching their highest level since March 2020, just as the coronavirus pandemic was breaking in the U.S.

Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac reported Thursday that the average rate on the benchmark 30-year home loan rose to 3.45% this week from 3.22% last week. It was at 3.5% in late March of 2020 when the pandemic was just starting. A year ago, the 30-year rate stood at 2.79%.

The average rate on 15-year, fixed-rate mortgages, popular among those refinancing their homes, rose to 2.62% from 2.43% last week.

"This was driven by the prospect of a faster than expected tightening of monetary policy in response to continued inflation exacerbated by uncertainty in labor and supply chains," said Sam Khater, Freddie Mac's chief economist. "The rise in mortgage rates so far this year has not yet affected purchase demand, but given the fast pace of home price growth, it will likely dampen demand in the near future."

Available housing has been in short supply since long before the pandemic started, and prices have risen close to 20% in the past year. Higher mortgage rates could make it even harder for homebuyers to secure a new home.

Mortgage rates have been expected to rise this year after the Federal Reserve announced last month that it would begin dialing back its monthly bond purchases - which are intended to lower long-term rates - to slow accelerating inflation. But even with the expected three or four rate increases in 2022, the Fed's benchmark rate would still be historically low at around 1%.

On Wednesday, the government reported that inflation spiked to 7% in December from a year earlier, the sharpest such increase in four decades. Earlier Thursday, the Labor Department reported that prices at the wholesale level surged by a record 9.7% in December from a year earlier.

In addition to surging inflation, experts expect robust economic growth and the tight labor market to continue to push rates higher.

Although U.S. jobless claims climbed by 23,000 last week to 230,000, it's still low by historic standards and the highly contagious omicron variant doesn't appear to have triggered layoffs yet.



A "Sold" sign is on display on the lawn of a new house in Pearl, Miss., Thursday, Sept 23, 2021. Fierce competition, low mortgage rates and soaring prices helped drive how much homebuyers borrowed to purchase a home in 2021 to an all-time high, eclipsing the mid-2000s housing boom peak. Banks issued an estimated \$1.61 trillion in home purchase loans last year, an increase of about 9% from 2020, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association. (AP)

US to lease nearly 500K acres for wind power development

TRENTON, New Jersey, Jan 13, (AP): The federal government will lease an area larger than half the size of Rhode Island off New Jersey's and New York's coasts for wind power development, the first offshore lease in the Biden Administration, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced Wednesday.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management auction of nearly 500,000 acres (202,300 hectares) is planned for next month and covers parcels off the so-called New York Bight and could lead to enough energy production to power up to 2 million homes, according to the Interior Department.

The announcement comes as President Joe Biden's administration aims to reach 30 gigawatts of offshore wind production by 2030, with more than half of it expected to come from New Jersey and New York by 2035. The project announced Wednesday could account for up to 7 gigawatts, the de-

partment said.

Haaland announced the lease on a call, joined by Democratic governors Phil Murphy of New Jersey and Kathy Hochul of New York as well as AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler. The project gives the country a chance to fight climate change and create "good-paying, union jobs," Haaland said.

"We are at an inflection point for domestic offshore wind energy development. We must seize this moment - and we must do it together," she added. The decision to move forward with the lease comes after stakeholders, including commercial fisheries, weighed in and resulted in a reduction of the size of the lease area by 72%, according to the department.

The closest distance to New Jersey among the parcels is 27 nautical miles (50 kilometers) offshore, while the nearest to New York is 20 nautical miles away (37 kilometers), according to the bureau.

Company recognizes winners of KEF Showjumping Tour's 4th round

Zain main supporter of equestrian sports and athletes



Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, took part in recognizing the winners of the fourth round in the Kuwait Equestrian Federation's Showjumping Tour. The competition, held for the first time by KEF, features over 300 showjumpers from across the nation's equestrian clubs.

The award ceremony was held after the conclusion of the fourth round at Messilah Equestrian Club, and witnessed the attendance of Kuwait Equestrian Federation Chairman Masoud Johar Hayat, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al Khashti, Zain and KEF officials, as well as huge crowds of equestrian enthusiasts.

Zain is proud to sponsoring this

unique local sporting event in collaboration with the Kuwait Equestrian Federation. The company's support springs from its corporate sustainability strategy towards supporting Kuwaiti sports and youth. Zain is a strong believer in the talents and capabilities of the nation's young athletes, especially those who are passionate about equestrian sports, which are deep rooted in Kuwaiti, Arab, and Islamic identity.

The first edition of the Kuwait Equestrian Federation's Showjumping Tour (2021-2022 season) witnesses the participation of over 300 showjumpers who represent public and private equestrian clubs from across the nation. The tour features 8 competitions held across three clubs: Hunting and Equestrian Club, Kuwait Riding Center, and Messilah

Equestrian Club.

Zain is always keen on supporting the various sports programs and official competitions hosted in Kuwait with the aim of elevating the Kuwaiti sports scene. The company strongly believes that the private sector has a vital role in progressing sports and youth initiatives, and it makes this belief a reality by shouldering similar events.

As a leading private sector company in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti sports and athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition and support they deserve.