

Advances

New Mercedes GST to be Built in Alabama in Tuscaloosa County

The new Mercedes-Benz Grand Sports Tourer—part touring car, part station wagon, part sport utility vehicle—will be produced at the Tuscaloosa County plant. The GST, which was unveiled as a concept car at the North American Auto Show in Detroit this January, will be geared for the North American market. The concept car is a six-passenger, 15-foot long vehicle with a 5.5-liter V8 AMG engine, butterfly side doors that open in opposite directions, and a glass roof that tints at the touch of a button. Officials have not decided whether the GST will be built at the original plant, or the on-site \$600 million expansion, which is expected to be completed by early 2004. The GST is scheduled to begin production by the end of 2004. ■

Aerospace Company Joins Huntsville's High-tech Community

Williams International will build its newest jet engine manufacturing facility in Huntsville. Williams will invest \$268 million in the facility, which will initially employ 80, with that number growing to over 700 over the next few years.

Williams International's Huntsville facility will be the latest addition to Alabama's growing aerospace technology and manufacturing sector, which includes Boeing, Lockheed-Martin, Raytheon, Panalpina, NASA Marshall Space Flight Center and Redstone Arsenal.

The company's Huntsville facility will serve as a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) center for general aviation aircraft. Employees at the facility will also manufacture parts and components for small gas turbine engines, resulting in a new generation of lighter, lower-cost jet airplanes that will be faster, quieter, more comfortable and have a longer range than current jet aircraft. ■



Grand Sports Tourer

Innomotive Chooses Alabama for U.S. Headquarters

Innomotive Systems recently broke ground on a \$17.6 million facility at the Airport Industrial Park in Tuscaloosa that will employ 120. Innomotive will manufacture front and rear-end modules at the plant, which will also serve as the U.S. headquarters for the German-based company. Innomotive was recently awarded business for the Mercedes-Benz Grand Sports Tourer and the next generation M-Class, which will both be produced at Mercedes' Tuscaloosa County facility. Innomotive Systems U.S. is a subsidiary of ISE Innomotive Systems Europe GmbH, which is based in Bergneustadt, Germany. ISE has investments throughout Europe, South Africa and China. ■

Japanese Auto Supplier Locates in Cullman

Tokyo-based Topre Corp. is investing \$45.7 million in a 250,000 square-foot metal stamping facility in Cullman. The company, which supplies stamped parts to Honda and Nissan, hopes to land additional contracts with other automakers and suppliers. Topre plans to increase the plant to 700,000 square-feet over three phases for up to a \$100 million investment. Employment may reach 300. Cullman beat out sites in Tennessee and Kentucky for the project. ■

Toray Will Build \$30 Million Teflon Fiber Plant in Decatur in 2003

Japan-based Toray Group, the parent company of Toray Carbon Fibers, will open another plant in Decatur. Toray Fluorofibers Inc. will begin construction in early 2003 for a \$30 million plant to produce a Teflon fiber. The fiber will be used for parts, sealants and other compounds in a variety of industries. Construction on the plant, which will employ 53, is scheduled to be completed in late 2004. ■

EDPA Names New Chairman, Interim President

Alabama Power Co. President and Chief Executive Officer Charles D. McCrary was elected chairman of the board of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama. McCrary succeeds Garry Neil Drummond, president and chief executive officer of Drummond Company, Inc.

Also, Jim Hayes was named interim president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama. Hayes, a Birmingham businessman, is a former commissioner of the Alabama Department of Revenue and director of the Alabama Development Office. ■

Tissue Plant Locates in Shoals

SCA will build a new tissue converting, papermaking and distribution facility in Barton, to be known as SCA Tissue—Barton Operations. The facility will represent an investment of \$240 million and create approximately 400 jobs.

By mid-2004, SCA will occupy more than 1.3 million square feet on 700 acres in Barton Riverfront Industrial Park, which is owned by the Shoals Economic Development Authority. SCA Tissue—Barton Operations will produce tissue, paper and personal care products for the automotive, food service, hospitality, health care and janitorial/sanitary industries, as well as office buildings.

Alabama in Top Five for Business Climate Says Microsoft bCentral

Alabama is the fourth best state in the country for businesses, according to Microsoft bCentral, an Internet site dedicated to helping small business owners. The author of the report evaluated data and other studies to come up with his own ranking of the best and worst places in the U.S. to operate a successful business. Alabama trailed only Nevada, Florida and Texas. Among metropolitan areas in the U.S., Birmingham/Tuscaloosa ranked eighth.

The two other studies that were evaluated were the Small Business Survival Index and Cognetics' Entrepreneurial Hot Spots, both of which included Alabama in their top 10. ■

Alabama Lands a "Big Fish"

Scenes from Alabama will make the upcoming Tim Burton film *Big Fish* all the more genuine.

The movie is based on the novel, *Big Fish: A Novel of Epic Proportions*, by Birmingham native Daniel Wallace. The book tells the story of a dying father and his son, who is trying to learn more about his father by piecing together the stories he has gathered over the years. The son recreates his father's elusive life in a series of legends inspired by the few facts he knows.

"All of my books take place in

Alabama," says Wallace. "It's gratifying that the film will create the same background that I've always had in my own mind."

The entire movie will be filmed in Alabama from start to finish according to the film's publicist. Principal filming sites for the film are Montgomery, Wetumpka, Tallassee, Millbrook, Lowndesboro and Prattville.

The star-studded project will feature such big names as Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Jessica Lange, Danny DeVito, Helena Bonham Carter, Steve Buscemi, Billy Crudup, Alison Lohman, Robert Guillaume and Marion Cotillard.

Screenwriter for the Columbia Pictures project is John August. Producers are Dan Jinks, Bruce Cohen and Richard D. Zanuck. Filming began in January and should continue through the end of April.

The Alabama Film Office says that this may be the highest-budgeted picture to be filmed in Alabama. It will have an estimated \$25 million impact on the central portion of the state. ■