

Isle sales of used cars, trucks drop 13.4%

Honolulu Advertiser 3/15/2008

Sales of used cars and light trucks in Hawai'i were steady for most of 2007, but a sudden slowdown in sales during the fourth quarter of the year resulted in an overall 13.4 percent drop last year from the previous year.

The number of used-car and light-truck registrations slid from 115,530 in 2006 to 100,075 in 2007, according to a report by Auto Outlook Inc., a research firm that tracks sales of new- and used-car sales activity for the Hawai'i Automobile Association. In February, the firm reported an 11 percent decline in the number of new vehicles sold here in 2007.

The latest report revealed that the state's used-vehicle market was strong for the first three quarters of 2007, but sales began to slip as the economy slowed down.

"For most of the year, the state's used-vehicle market was a relative bright spot," the report said. "Unfortunately, that came to an abrupt end during the fourth quarter when retail used-vehicle registrations declined nearly 25 percent from year-earlier levels."

The forecast for 2008 isn't bright, as fears of a recession are expected to impact the purchasing habits of consumers, the report said.

"Consumers have been walking a tenuous financial tightrope for many years and the pressures are mounting," Auto Outlook said. "Cost-conscious consumers will likely find a used car a desirable alternative to a new one, but the number of prospective buyers is likely to decline. Many consumers will stay on the sidelines as they take remedial actions to repair ailing balance sheets."

Last year, used-car registrations dropped 12.2 percent from 2006, while light-truck registrations slid by 14.8 percent. Sales in each county took a hit, with the biggest drop of 14.2 percent coming on O'ahu.

The top-selling used car in 2007 was the 2002 Honda Civic, followed by the 2004 Honda Civic, 2004 Toyota Corolla, 2004 Honda Accord and the 2002 Honda Accord. The most popular used light truck was the 2004 Toyota Tacoma, followed by the 2003 Toyota Tacoma, 2002 Toyota Tacoma, 2004 Ford F-Series and the 2002 Ford F-Series.

Reach Curtis Lum at culum@honoluluadvertiser.com.