



# GM's Lordstown Plant Hosts Fans For Annual 'CruzeTalk'

By KABIR BHATIA (/PEOPLE/KABIR-BHATIA) • 11 HOURS AGO

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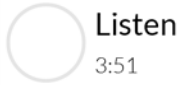


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The members of the CruzeTalk online group consider themselves a family, and meet each year at the GM plant where their cars are built.

KABIR BHATIA / WKSU

The GM plant (<http://wksu.org/post/layoffs-loom-lordstown-product-gas-prices-not-trade-policies>) in Lordstown is billed as “The Home of the Chevy Cruze.” And over the weekend, Cruze owners came home to celebrate their cars and also ponder the plant’s future.



*CruzeTalk in Lordstown*

The Lordstown plant opened on what had been 900 acres of open fields northwest of Youngstown in 1966. Since then, it’s turned out millions of vehicles for GM -- mostly compact Chevys. That means the plant’s fortunes have usually ridden a rollercoaster alongside gas prices.

GM Lordstown’s peak year was 1985, when 12,000 people busily turned out Chevy Cavaliers. But next month, staffing will be about a tenth of that as the second shift is eliminated (<http://wksu.org/post/lordstowns-mayor-worries-about-gm-layoffs-impact-younger-workers>) due to slumping demand for the Cruze on the back of low gas prices. GM has seen sales of the once-best-selling compact cut in half since last year, when the third shift was eliminated.

“You don’t want to see Americans lose American-made jobs,” says Krysta Stonier from Tiffin, who came to Lordstown over the weekend for “CruzeTalk.”

“Yes, I’m concerned for the future of the Cruze and, obviously, Lordstown and the workers there and I hope for the best. I really do.”

### **An online family**

The CruzeTalk annual gathering is for owners who frequent a website of the same name to swap stories, know-how, and tips on customizing their cars (<http://www.cruzetalk.com/forum/385-gen2-appearance-body-detailing-interior/233305-2018-cruze-wish-list.html>).

“I have a 2011 Chevy Cruze. I’ve heavily modified it. I’ve blown out some pistons, so I went with some forged pistons. Upgraded the turbo, injectors, throttle body, spacer, exhaust -- I’m sure there’s more; I can never remember all of it.”

Stonier is not alone. Most of her 70 fellow owners at this weekend’s CruzeTalk have done either cosmetic or mechanical customization to their cars. Daniel Parra from southern California added a special suspension and wheels. He flew in for the Lordstown trip, though, preferring to keep the miles off his first-year Cruze.

“We all have different goals for our car. My friend Krysta here, she’s for performance. Me, more aesthetics. We accept everyone. Whatever goal they have for their car -- or whatever budget they have -- we don’t hate.”

### **The bottom line**

Budget is one word that came up a few times among the Cruze owners who said the car’s low price makes it perfect for modifications. Russell Houlton from Hawaii – who did not drive to Lordstown -- explains.

“You don’t want to touch something that’s ultra-expensive and you’re afraid of breaking something. Ultimately, everybody wants a little bit of customization.”

Houlton suggested that if GM offered factory direct speed parts – which wouldn't void the car's warranty – it might attract more buyers. Robert Blasi from Kenosha, Wisconsin, agrees, adding that GM should offer sportier engine and transmission options.

“Yes, you're not building 95 percent of them for the enthusiast, but you want to appeal to the enthusiast. Because that gives people – other people – ‘I like that. I want one of those.’ And they just buy a normal vehicle and that's what they drive because it's reliable.”

### **Wearing a halo**

Daniel Parra explains the strategy – known as having a “halo vehicle” – used by some other automakers.

“Ford had their Focus ST and RS. Subaru has their WRX and STI. As a Chevy owner, you want to also have something that can compete with that. I can guarantee you: most of these people, if a faster model came out, they'd probably want to upgrade to that. And they'd stay in the Cruze family [and] the GM family.”

For small American cars, Krysta Stonier and her other “CruzeTalkers” say GM may soon be the only option (<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/26/605971051/ford-to-phase-out-traditional-ford-sedans-such-as-fusion-and-taurus-in-the-u-s>).


“If Chrysler and Ford – two of the Big Three – get out of making cars, there's a really good chance that maybe Lordstown will flourish again.”


For that to happen, sales will have to rebound. Right now, Lordstown's workers have combined their two unions, which have a new president (<http://wksu.org/post/new-uaw-president-says-his-priority-getting-gm-build-more-products-lordstown#stream/0>) who says his top priority is bringing more product to the plant – possibly in the form of a crossover – to bring back jobs. And in the near future, GM will start building the third generation Cruze in Lordstown this summer.

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