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# Centre a building in motion

R&D facility fuels manufacturing sector's hopes

Scott Deveau, Financial Post  
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In this story: **F US\$13.90** **\$0.00**

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Tyler Anderson, National Post

John Komar, resident engineering manager for General Motors of Canada, stands in front of the fan that is part of a five-storey climatic wind tunnel that simulates various weather conditions at the ...

"This is not a building," said John Komar, General Motors of Canada's manager of a new landmark research-and-development facility on the outskirts of Toronto, standing next to a five-storey-tall wind tunnel. "It's a machine that is actually the size of a building."

After suffering through one of its toughest years in history, the Canadian manufacturing sector has high hopes that the new \$123-million testing facility in Oshawa, Ont., will help it compete more aggressively in advanced technology and create new work in the country.

Only the final touches are being put on the General Motors of Canada Automotive Centre for Excellence. With construction set to be completed in June, the testing facility is essentially open for business, and that has caught the attention of manufacturers across the country.

Despite its name, GM won't be the only manufacturer using the facility. The project is part of the automaker's Beacon Project, a \$2.5-billion investment in the province of Ontario announced in 2005, but when it officially opens in the latter part of the year, any manufacturer that wants to use it can.

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"It's the only one of its kind in Canada," said Gary Elfstrom, the facilities director of business development.

The ACE, which is located on the campus of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, will house the wind tunnel, which is so large it will be able to do environmental and durability testing on transport trucks and buses. It will also house a myriad of equipment able to recreate hurricane winds, desert heat and the freezing cold of the Arctic for manufacturers to test their products, Mr. Elfstrom said.

This has caught the attention of many firms across the country, from landing-gear manufacturers to those in the alternative energy fields, who currently have to test their products in the United States. It's a process that is both cumbersome and costly, Mr. Elfstrom said.

The facility will be a boon for smaller manufacturers that are unable to build their own test facilities, he added.

For people like Carmine Pizzurro, president of eCamion Inc., a lithium-ion manufacturer in Whitby, Ont., the ACE is a dream come true.

"We've been decimated in manufacturing here in Southern Ontario in the past few decades," he said. "Everything was going to Mexico, now it's China and India. The only way we can compete is to be world-class in terms of technology and be the forefront of being what is the latest and the greatest."

Mr. Pizzurro, who currently does the environmental testing on his batteries in Michigan, is well aware of the red tape and cost involved in shipping his products across the border for tests. He said the process can often run in the tens of thousands of dollars, and significantly increases the cost of development. "This way I can just go up the street," he said. "It's like buying a car versus just renting it for a couple weeks."

Moreover, because the ACE is being built in conjunction with the university, the level of training and research that can be performed on the site will be a boon for years to come, said Jayson Meyers, president of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

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