Plans filed locally call for expansion

ALL IN THE FAMILY



BMW X3 COURTESY OF BMW



The BMW X5 EB.ANDRIUOLO



BMW X6 EB.ANDRIUOLO

By Woody White and Rudolph Bell
Staff writers

BMW plans to expand its Greer manufacturing campus to build its biggest SUV yet, according to published reports.

Both *The Wall Street Journal* and Handelsblatt, a German business newspaper, reported that the automaker will expand its only U.S. plant to build the X7, a larger model than the X5, its first SUV model and a big seller for almost 15 years.

A site plan BMW filed with the Spartanburg County Planning and Development Department details plans to build a 675,000-square-foot body shop, BMW's third on the campus, near the intersection of Interstate 85 and Brockman McClimon Road.

The plans also show a 371-space expansion of an existing employee parking lot, a new road onto the campus and space for a future "energy center."

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>
> **TOMMY KURANOFF,** general manager of Century BMW of Greenville

The X7 reports come at a time when BMW has recently disclosed plans for a big expansion in Greer.

Steve Wilson, a spokesman for BMW Manufacturing Co., declined to comment on whether the plans were related to what the company plans to announce next week.

Kenn Sparks, spokesman for BMW of North America, wouldn't comment on the X7 reports.

Gov. Nikki Haley, after a speech at a Greenville Chamber lunch this week, said next week's announcement at BMW's Greer plant would be "fun," but didn't offer details.

The X7 would allow BMW to compete with Mercedes-Benz's GL-Class and the Cadillac Escalade for customers who want a large luxury SUV with three rows of seats.

The Greer plant is nearing the completion of a $900 million expansion announced in 2012 that would increase annual production capacity to 350,000 vehicles per year.

The next expansion, expected to be announced next Fri-

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REPORTS: BMW TO BUILD X7 SUV HERE



News reports say BMW is planning to expand its facility in Greer to manufacture its biggest SUV yet, the X7. STAFF FILE

BMW

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day at BMW Manufacturing Co., would increase capacity to about 400,000 vehicles per year, both publications reported.

The local plant is the home to most of BMW's family of X vehicles and already produces the X3, X4, X5 and X6 models.

Handelsblatt reported that production of the X7 goes hand in hand with BMW's introduction of the i3 electric runabout that went on sale late last year.

The newspaper said that BMW's X models have been enormous profit-makers but that their carbon footprint needed to be balanced with electric and hybrid vehicles to meet the European Union's fleet fuel emissions target.

The Wall Street Journal said that most of the X7s would be sold in the United States, with some being exported to China, the Middle East and Europe.

BMW Manufacturing Co. has typically exported about 70 percent of its vehicles for years.

Domestic dealers say they would welcome every bit of increase in production capacity at the Greer plant, as it would give them more vehicles to sell.

Tommy Kuranoff, general manager of Century BMW of Greenville, said he can't get enough of the third generation of the X5, which went into production in October.

"Its popularity has grown through the years. Customers love that car," he said of the X5. "When we get them, we sell them."

He said the dealership sells all X5s it gets "within days."



Plans indicate a a 675,000-square-foot body shop is planned for the BMW Greer campus. STAFF FILE

Sparks said the X5 has the biggest sales backlog of any vehicle BMW sells in the United States.

BMW of North America, the automaker's U.S. sales and marketing arm, "is always asking for more for our dealers in the U.S.," Sparks said. "Our dealers tell us they can sell every X5 they can get."

Two German rivals of BMW in the luxury car market, Mercedes-Benz and Audi, have been expanding their manufacturing in North America.

Mercedes recently added production capacity to its Vance, Ala., plant, where it builds M-Class SUVs, and made the factory its primary production facility for its top-selling C-Class sedan. Audi is currently building a new plant in Mexico.

The companies are racing each other for the title of leading luxury car maker.

BMW was the top-selling luxury brand in the world in 2012 with sales of 1.66 million vehicles. Audi sold 1.58 million vehicles around the globe, with Mercedes a close third with sales of 1.57 million.