



Unlocking the Potential of U.S. Auto Manufacturing Capacity

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A Global Auto Power with Untapped Potential

UAW members built the American auto industry—and we remain its backbone today. The American Dream was born in Flint, Michigan, where autoworkers sat down on the job and won a dignified life for factory workers across the country. Those UAW contracts laid the foundation for not only a decent living for the blue-collar working class in America, but for a global auto industry powerhouse.

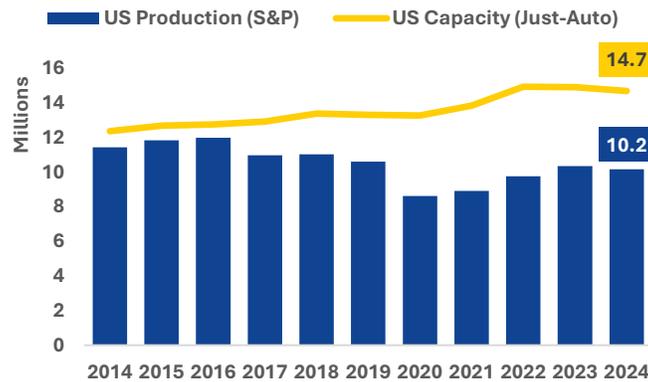
In 2024, the United States ranked second in global vehicle production, behind only China and ahead of Japan, Germany, and South Korea. That strength isn't just about geography or infrastructure—it's about the skilled, unionized workforce that has powered generation after generation of innovation, quality, and productivity on the shop floor.

But despite the unmatched capability of UAW autoworkers, the industry is not operating at full strength. Instead of harnessing the full power of union labor to lead the next era of automotive innovation, companies are leaving millions of vehicles—and tens of thousands of jobs—on the table. They're offshoring production to low-wage, high-exploitation countries like Mexico, where vehicles are built on the backs of underpaid workers and sold back in the U.S. at a premium.

This underutilization isn't accidental—it's the result of a deliberate strategy that puts offshoring, stock buybacks, and short-term profits ahead of investment in union jobs, strong communities, and long-term stability. The solution isn't just to produce more—it's to produce more here, with union labor, and rebuild the power of American workers.

Overview: A Gap Between Capacity and Production

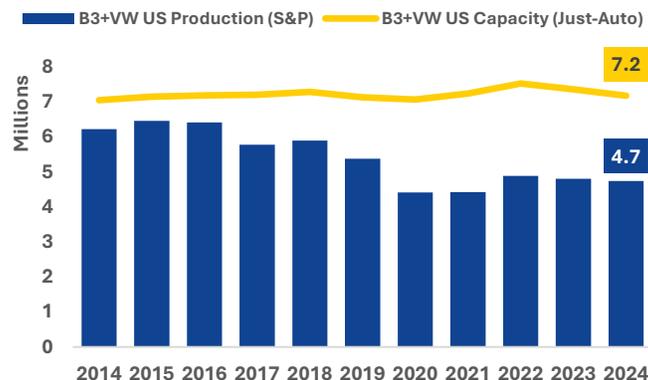
In 2024, the U.S. auto industry had the capacity to build more than 14.7 million vehicles. However, only 10.2 million vehicles were produced, leaving 4.5 million units of unused capacity. This production gap highlights a significant opportunity for revitalizing domestic auto manufacturing and supporting American workers.



Even this figure underrepresents the true potential. The 14.7 million capacity figure **does not** include major plants that have been closed or idled in recent years—such as GM’s Lordstown and Orion facilities, or Stellantis’s Belvidere plant. With additional facilities re-opening or coming online, the U.S. has the infrastructure in place to produce millions more vehicles.

Big 3 : The Center of Underutilization

The bulk of unused capacity lies with the traditional U.S. automakers—General Motors (GM), Ford, Stellantis (STLA)). These companies, which enjoyed a decade of record profits, have dramatically scaled back domestic production.



In 2015, the Big 3, along with Volkswagen (where workers recently joined the UAW), produced 6.5 million vehicles in the U.S. By 2024, that number had fallen to 4.7 million—a drop of 1.8 million vehicles. While U.S. production lags, these same automakers have

restored output in Mexico to pre-pandemic levels. This trend represents more than a simple shift in geography—it has a direct impact on American workers and communities.

Every shuttered or underutilized plant symbolizes layoffs, economic decline, and a retreat from the middle-class promise once anchored by union auto jobs.

Plant-by-Plant Breakdown: Declines in Capacity Utilization

In 2024, numerous plants across the country were operating far below their capabilities.

- **Ford Flat Rock:** Operating at 21% capacity. Production is down 73% from 2015.
- **Ford Louisville:** At 58% capacity, producing 44% fewer vehicles than in 2017.
- **Ford Michigan Assembly:** At 56% capacity, with 31% fewer vehicles than in 2013.
- **Ford Ohio Assembly:** At 30% capacity, down 69% since 2012.
- **GM Lansing Grand River:** Only 20% capacity utilized. Output has dropped 82% since 2016.
- **GM Fairfax:** At 45% capacity, producing 43% fewer vehicles than in 2016.
- **GM Orion:** Currently at 0% capacity. This plant produced 250,000 vehicles in 2008.
- **GM Lordstown:** At 0% capacity. Output was 290,000 vehicles in 2014.
- **GM Factory Zero:** Running at 21% capacity, down 49% since 2016.
- **GM Spring Hill:** Operating at 53% capacity, down 44% from 2017.
- **STLA Belvidere:** At 0% capacity. Once produced 349,000 vehicles in 2014.
- **STLA Warren Truck:** At 44% capacity, down 75% since 2017.
- **STLA Toledo:** At 44% capacity, producing 58% fewer vehicles than in 2015.
- **STLA Jefferson North (JNAP):** Operating at 68% capacity, with a 51% production decline since 2018.
- **STLA Sterling Heights (SHAP):** At 54% capacity, down 45% from 2019.
- **VW Chattanooga:** Company announced a shift cut in March 2024, indicating underutilization.

Reclaiming Capacity: A Path to Jobs and Growth

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, the auto industry produces about 50 vehicles per worker annually. Based on this estimate:

- Filling an additional 1 million vehicles of capacity could add **20,000 U.S. auto jobs**.
- Reaching full existing capacity—4.5 million more vehicles—could create up to **90,000 new manufacturing jobs**, not to mention **630,000 more** in the rest of the U.S. economy.

This is about more than numbers. It's about rebuilding the foundation of the American auto industry, revitalizing communities, and providing family-sustaining jobs.

Conclusion: An Industry Call to Action

The American auto industry has a proud legacy of rising to national challenges—from mobilizing for World War II as the [Arsenal of Democracy](#) to [producing critical medical equipment](#) during the COVID-19 crisis. Today, the challenge is economic. With vast unused capacity and a workforce ready to build, the time has come for the industry to step up again.

We must stop the trend of offshoring and disinvestment, and the global race to the bottom. Instead, let's harness the capacity we have to build vehicles in the U.S., create good union jobs, and secure a future that works for workers and communities alike.

Sources:

- Production Data: S&P Mobility
- Capacity Utilization: Just-Auto
- [Vehicles per Worker Estimate: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis \(2019\)](#)