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Canadian auto sales fall 7.2 percent in August

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TORONTO, Sept 3 (Reuters) - Canadians bought fewer vehicles in August amid higher gasoline prices and a slowing economy, though import namebrands, which have traditionally focused on smaller, more fuel efficient vehicles, fared much better than the Detroit-based "Big Three".

Automakers sold 146,978 vehicles overall in Canada in August, down 7.2 percent year-over-year, industry figures showed on Wednesday.

Import brands saw sales rise a collective 3.4 percent in the month, while the Big Three saw sales fall 17.1 percent.

General Motors of Canada (GM.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)), the country's biggest automaker, saw its August sales tumble 17.1 percent to 32,097 units.

"GM Canada's August sales reflect low inventory levels on some of our key small cars as a result of the ongoing shift in consumer demand to more fuel efficient choices," said Marc Comeau, vice-president of sales, service and marketing at GM Canada.

"While we continue to monitor the Canadian marketplace we are anticipating a strong finish for the year," he said.

GM's car sales fell 19 percent to 15,640 units, while light truck sales -- which include pickups and SUVs -- declined 15.2 percent to 16,457.

Ford Motor Co. of Canada (F.N: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) sold 20,764 vehicles in the month, down 10.2 percent from a year earlier. Car sales dropped 25.3 percent to 4,210 units, while truck sales fell 5.4 percent to 16,554.

Chrysler Canada [CBS.UL] saw sales slide 24.2 percent to 15,548 units. Car sales fell 39.3 percent to 2,517, while truck sales were down 20.3 percent at 13,031.

Toyota Canada Inc (7203.T: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)), the country's No. 2 automaker, bucked the negative trend and recorded its eighth-consecutive record sales month in August, up 29.3 percent from a year earlier to 23,204.

Sales at the automaker's Toyota division increased 30.2 percent to 22,037 units, while its luxury Lexus division sold 1,167 vehicles for a 14.5 percent rise. The company said sales of its hybrid Prius jumped 141.1 percent, and sales of its Highlander hybrid were up 100 percent.

Honda Canada Inc (7267.T: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) reported a drop in sales of 19 percent over the previous August to 14,817 units.

The automaker said sales at its Honda division fell 18 percent to 13,516 units, while its Acura division was down 27 percent to 1,301 units. (Reporting by John McCrank; editing by Rob Wilson)

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