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John Bova,
Thule quality coordinator



Smoothing the Road: RoughDecks® checkweigh Chryslers

In 1920, Walter P. Chrysler teamed up with three ex-Studebaker engineers to design a revolutionary new car. They defined the Chrysler brand as affordable “luxury” vehicles known for innovative, top-flight engineering. Within a decade of its founding, Chrysler Corporation had earned the title of Detroit’s “engineering company.” Their automotive firsts included Floating Power (a new method of mounting engines to isolate vibration), replaceable oil filters, downdraft carburetors and one-piece curved windshields. For years, Chrysler enjoyed a premium luxury position competing with Cadillac and Lincoln.

Following Fiat’s acquisition of a 20% stake in Chrysler LLC, Fiat declared their plan to return the brand to an upmarket marque and launched their marketing slogan—*Imported from Detroit*. One example of that return to top-flight engineering and luxury is a smooth, quiet ride. Toward that end, Ron Little, Kanawha Scales, Michigan, has devised an unusual application of RoughDecks.

The system consists of four pit-style RoughDecks® and a 920i dual channel indicator that is set up in Chrysler’s “customer satisfaction audit area” at the auto manufacturing plant in East Detroit. Ron explains that during each shift, twenty cars are “audited” by being driven over the four scales. The driver gets out and scans the VIN number sticker into the 920i. The system weighs each wheel, records the individual wheel weight, combined weight, time and date. The information is then passed on to each local plant and then on to corporate over Chrysler’s dedicated server. The whole process takes about 30 seconds. Kanawha installed the first test system in 2008. After several months of testing, Ron has installed several more systems in Chrysler plants in the U.S. and Canada. ■

solution became an obvious answer to the problem. Checkweighing 100% of the packages makes the best buying experience for Thule customers.

“Corporate had been thinking of systems to ID product for traceability, and we were already on it from the checkweighing for missing parts.” Representatives from the corporate office in Sweden came out, looked at the solution, and wanted it duplicated. “They’re talking about all the products and plants. In October we’ll do Chicago, then Florida, then Massachusetts, then Europe.”

John Russo, Jr., improved on the first 920i-based system in the second build. “To reduce cost, I used 720i’s instead of the 920i. Now the user can checkweigh and see the actual results whereas we were just running a light box with a remote 920i. When there is an error, the operator can enter a comment to record what was wrong and which part was missing.” The first system John designed was hard-wired. But because of the way Thule constantly

changes their packing areas, this second system has evolved into 16 wireless 720i units networked back to a computer running MS SQL Server 2005 Express Editor. The units can be rolled to any work cell as needed. John is working on an even more sophisticated system which will include negative weighing—checking to see if the operator took a part from a bin.

John Bova is pleased. “All the cell leaders can change jobs; these 720i systems can be rolled to where they are needed. It’s a great benefit to have the display right in front of them. I can monitor the whole system at my desk and pull up all the scales or any one scale and monitor to read the comments in real time. If I see a lot of errors, I can go and investigate what may be going wrong; maybe they’re putting in the wrong hardware bag or maybe they changed cartons.”

When you assemble your car rack from Thule, they want you to be completely satisfied. It’s part of the Thule experience from start to the finish line. ■