

LA dealership challenges Ricart as Ford's top dog  
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By Kathy Showalter

Galpin Ford of the San Fernando Valley outside Los Angeles is taking aim at Ricart Ford's spot as the nation's largest Ford dealership.

If 1996 end-of-the-model-year figures released this week by Ford Motor Company are any indication, Galpin's aim is pretty good.

According to Jim Bright, Ford's public affairs manager, Galpin Ford outsold Ricart Ford 10,918 to 10,275 for the 1996 model year ended Oct. 3. The numbers reflect cars and trucks, fleet and retail sales and leasing.

The only category Ricart Ford outsold Galpin Ford was in fleet sales: Ricart Ford sold 2,665 to Galpin's 694.

Ricart Ford, which portends to be the nation's largest car dealership -- let alone Ford dealership, bases its claim on calendar-year dollar volume, not car sales.

It's a legitimate claim, according to Ward's Dealer Business magazine, a trade publication that annually ranks the nation's 500 dealerships based on that criteria. Ricart Ford has ranked first both for 1994 and 1995 -- having done \$346.2 million in total revenue compared with second-ranked Galpin Ford, listed at \$310.4 million for 1995.

Galpin's most recent sales surge wasn't by accident. For the second year in a row, Galpin has used a "Beat Ricart" print and broadcast campaign designed to increase model year-end sales.

For example, a four-page ad that appeared in the Sept. 8 edition of the Los Angeles Times mentions Ricart or Ohio eight times.

"Ricart Ford is 2,250 miles from the San Fernando Valley," the advertisement reads. "Head east to Atlanta, Ga., and take a sharp turn left."

Immediately below the directions, the ad continues: "We're sure the people at Ricart are very nice, but wouldn't it be terrible to drive three days to Ricart to find out that Galpin had the best deal?"

Ricart's "We're dealin!" slogan appears elsewhere in the copy.

Bert Boeckmann, president and owner of Galpin Ford, could not be reached for comment.

Galpin's director of marketing Marybeth Baker called the competition friendly. \

Fred Ricart, who with brother Rhett Ricart own the local Ricart dealerships, appears unruffled by the campaign and competition.

"Whenever there's competition between two large dealerships, it is healthy," said Ricart. "There's no animosity because we're so far apart. If they can use us to sell more cars, it doesn't bother me."

Ricart noted, however, that his company never uses the Galpin name except to publish documented results, and the list his dealership puts the most stock in is one published by Ward's.

Charles Bohon, editor of Ward's Dealer Business, said that list is compiled using total dollar volume, not units sold.

"We feel it gives a better view of the overall dealer performance," said Bohon. "We've been doing the list for 10 years now. We're the only one that does it on a dollar volume basis, but we're looking at (dealers) as businesses and how well they perform."

According to that June list, which excludes fleet sales, Ricart sold 11,395 new retail units and 9,307 units in calendar 1995. Galpin Ford is listed as having sold 11,160 new units and 3,597 used units for the same period.

Interestingly, Dealer Business also lists Ricart's as first in the nation in finance and insurance sales, with a \$27.3 million total for 1995. Galpin generated \$6.6 million. Ford's Bright said its dealers prefer the company not release car sales volume because they can be calculated in so many ways.

"It gets complicated. You can do a combination of retail and fleet, just retail, just fleet, just cars, just trucks," Bright said. He notes that there are two separate tallies: one for end of the model year and one for the calendar year.

"I'm sure every year these two fight it out," Bright said.