

DALLAS – "It feels like someone just pulled the rug out from underneath me," said Tim Haddle, owner of Kunkle Motors in Dallas, as Saab dealers in the US are being shut down.



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Kunkle Motors has been informed that it will be one of 81 Saab dealers in the United States that will not be asked to sell new Saabs once the company is sold to a subsidiary of Swedish carmaker Koenigsegg. General Motors, which has overseen Saab, filed for bankruptcy in June and put the Saab brand up for sale. The dealerships that didn't make the cut were informed of the decision last week.

"It feels like someone just pulled the rug out from underneath me," said Tim Haddle, owner of Kunkle Motors. Besides his dealership, Joseph Chermak Inc., the only other Saab dealer in Northeastern Pennsylvania was also informed it will not have its relationship with Saab extended with the new company. Chermak operates in South Abington Township, Lackawanna County, but also sells Suzukis.

"It's just astounding to me that they can cut off this many customers," Haddle said.

The closest Saab dealer to this area will be in Allentown once the agreement of sale is finalized.

If the deal to sell Saab falls through, GM would close Saab and all the rights to all 218 dealerships would be terminated, GM officials have said. The automaker is eliminating four of its eight brands, by selling Saab and Hummer, and slowly halting production of Pontiac and Saturn.

Haddle's grandfather Daniel Meeker started the relationship with Saab in 1952 and became the third dealership in the country to sell the make. Today Kunkle Motors is the longest

The end of the road for Saab dealers

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same-family-operated Saab dealership in the country.

"And we're probably one of the smallest," Haddle, of Kunkle, said. The dealership sells less than 50 Saabs a year but it does so to loyal customers who have become family.

It also repairs and services vehicles and handles factory warranty work for Saab.

What the business will be able to do and what it will look like in a month are unclear. The fate of his five employees is also in question.

"Nobody really knows what we can and can't do yet," Haddle said. He said he anticipates doing service work and selling used vehicles but said if Koenigsegg asked him to continue handling warranty-covered repairs, he'd accept the offer.

Mike Colleran, chief operating officer of Saab Cars North America, said that may be a possibility but it hasn't been discussed by company officials.

He said the decision not to bring all 218 dealerships on board if a sale is finalized was difficult but was the best one based on the company's "business plan."

"We wanted dealers that in the end can make money," Colleran said. "We came out with the 137 stores that we needed." He said non-subjective standards were used to determine which dealers would be asked to remain with Saab.

Haddle sent a letter to Saab asking for reconsideration of the company's decision and wrote, "if nothing else, consider dealers that have been rejected for sales becoming authorized parts and service centers."

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Colleran said any letters will be taken under advisement.

Chris Chermak, general manager at Joseph Chermak Inc., also wrote an appeals letter to Saab North America hoping for a reprieve or reconsideration. He said he has "very little" to lose by going that route but he also said he holds out little hope the new company will change its mind.

"We're not going to give up without a fight," Chermak, of Dalton, said. His dealership has been in business since 1945 and has sold Saab and Suzukis the past 20 years.

Chermak said the news "came totally out of the blue" and if you were to have asked him a week ago whether his dealership would be cut lose by Saab he's have placed a bet against that proposition.

The announcement is so fresh that Haddle said he's at a loss for what to say to customers that have been causing his phone to ring off the hook Monday.

"I'm just telling them to call the toll-free GM customer service line at 1-800-955-9007. That's all I can tell them right now," Haddle said.

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