

# Automobile Dealers: A 2021 Economic Brief

By Thomas Dice and John Epps

Released May 2023

E21-ARTS



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Industries in the **Automobile Dealers** group are classified by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) as subsector 4411. Establishments in this subsector are primarily engaged in retailing new and used automobiles and light trucks, such as sport utility vehicles, and passenger and cargo vans.

**New Car Dealers:** This industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in retailing new automobiles and light trucks, such as sport utility vehicles, and passenger and cargo vans, or retailing these new vehicles in combination with activities such as repair services, retailing used cars, and selling replacement parts and accessories. This consumer retail industry is classified as NAICS 441110.

**Used Car Dealers:** This industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in retailing used automobiles and light trucks, such as sport utility vehicles, and passenger and cargo vans. This consumer retail industry is classified as NAICS 441120.

Data in NAICS 441110 and 441120 are included in the estimated retail totals of the aggregate NAICS 4411 and are published by the Annual Retail Trade Survey (ARTS). Neither NAICS 441110,

441120, nor the aggregate 4411 include wholesale vendors, merchants, or distribution centers. The data estimates from ARTS are a commonly used resource in providing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy. These data estimates for 2021 were released to the public on December 15, 2022. The data tables are located at <[www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/econ/arts/annual-report.html](http://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/econ/arts/annual-report.html)>.

### Annual Retail Trade Survey

ARTS is a mandatory annual survey that collects sales, inventory, total operating expenses, and other data from businesses primarily engaged in retail trade—selling goods directly to consumers. Data tables comprised of estimated economic activity can be found at <[www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/econ/arts/annual-report.html](http://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/econ/arts/annual-report.html)>.

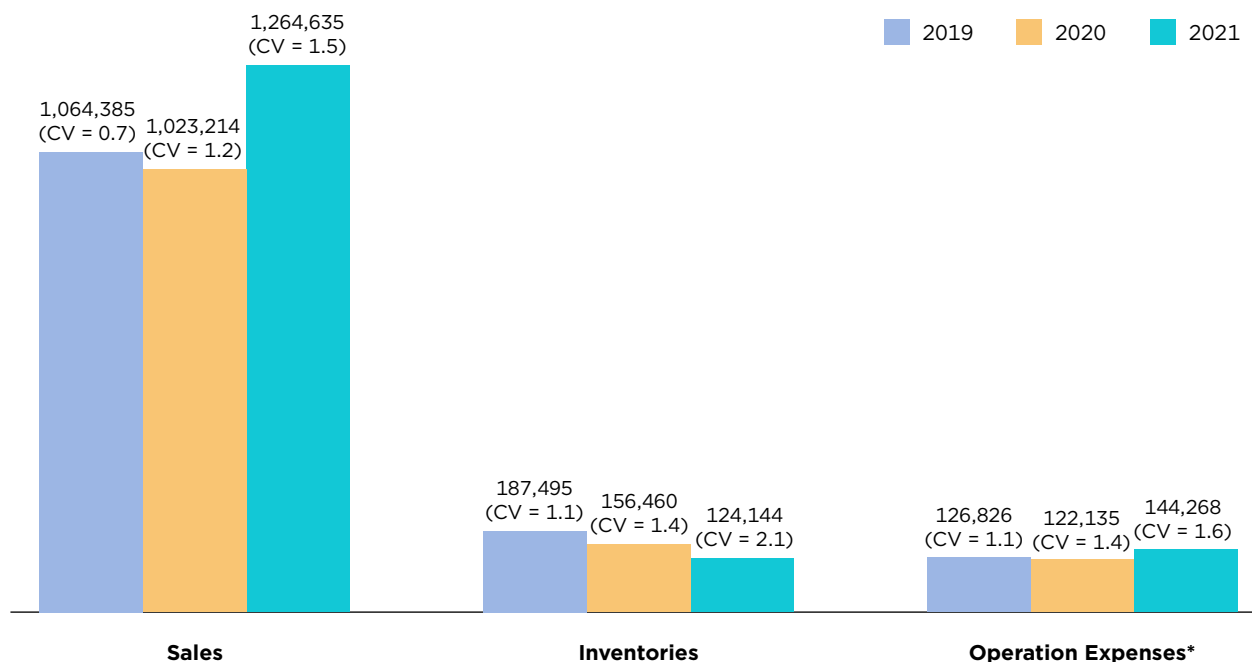
### SALES

Sales estimates represent the total sales and receipts of merchandise sold by all establishments primarily engaged in retail trade. They do not include sales by manufacturers, wholesalers, service establishments, and others whose primary activity is other than retail trade (Figure 1).

### INVENTORIES

The ARTS merchandise inventories are the end-of-year value of stocks of goods held for sale. The end-of-year inventory estimates represent the value, at cost, of the merchandise available for sale as of the last day of the reporting period. Merchandise inventories are shown for stores and warehouses servicing retail establishments. Only those warehouses that maintained supplies of merchandise primarily intended for distribution within the organization are included (Figure 1).

Figure 1.  
**Automobile Dealers (NAICS 4411): 2019 to 2021**  
(In millions of dollars)



\* Total operating expenses for 2019 and 2020 are not significantly different at the 90 percent confidence level.

Note: NAICS is the North American Industry Classification System. Estimates are based on a sample of employer firms. Firms without paid employees, or nonemployers, are included in the sales and end-of-year inventory estimates through imputation or administrative data provided by other federal agencies. Estimates are not adjusted for price changes. Differences between estimates may be attributed to sampling or nonsampling error, rather than underlying economic conditions. Estimates of sampling variability are measured using coefficient of variation (CV) and are expressed as a percentage of the estimate. Comparisons across items have not been tested for significance. Therefore, caution should be used in drawing conclusions from the estimates and comparisons shown. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/arts/technical-documentation/methodology.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/arts/technical-documentation/methodology.html)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 Annual Retail Trade Survey.

---

## TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES

Total operating expenses are the sum of detailed types of expenses and all other types of expenses not reported elsewhere. A list of all accepted types of operating expenses can be found at <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/arts/about/glossary.html#par\\_textimage\\_2055883173](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/arts/about/glossary.html#par_textimage_2055883173)>. Excluded are the cost of goods sold, capital expenditures, funds invested, interest expense, purchase of products for resale (cost of goods sold), bad debt, transfers made within the company, capitalized expenses, interest, impairment, other nonoperating expenses, and income, sales, and excise taxes (Figure 1).

## NOTES

The Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product (Data Management System [DMS] number: P-7500134, Disclosure Review Board [DRB] Approval ID: CBDRB-FY23-0058).

Data are subject to sampling and nonsampling error.

Annual Retail Trade Survey methodology, data collection, and survey design can be found at <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/arts/technical-documentation/methodology.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/arts/technical-documentation/methodology.html)>.