

Abu Dhabi → Dubai

The cars demanded by new roads.

The UAE was the sixth and final country in the Middle Eastern leg of the Drive Project. In Abu Dhabi we inspected the vehicles like we always do. We take a careful and pragmatic approach even for tasks that we repeat day after day.

Tomohiko Hayayama of the Tahara Plant Quality Control Division peers into the engine compartment like he always does. Yasushi Nitto of the Advanced Technical Skills Institute moves around more than the other team members, watching what they're doing and making sure that the work proceeds smoothly. Nitto, who joined the team in Qatar, sums

up his impression of the Middle East as "a land of newly built roads."

He continues, "*I feel like Middle Easterners take a critical look at cars. There are some mountainous areas, but there is still a lot of flat, open land. It follows that new, perfectly straight roads can be designed. So then what people want are cars with very good basic performance, because people don't have to do a lot when driving. We have to make cars whose components enhance the performance of the other components. To get maximum performance out of the engine, you have to have good steering stability, which is my field of work. The opposite is also true. From the seat position to the noise, we have to make cars in such a way that*

performance in one area benefits the other areas."

When the team rode in a hybrid Camry taxi on the weekend as part of its market research, they were impressed at the driver's driving skill. Now it is their turn to make driving on the busy streets of Abu Dhabi more pleasant. Nitto felt firsthand what kind of cars are in demand in the Middle East.





The value in feeling frustration.

The next day, after getting past an industrial area and the morning rush hour there, we headed for the desert. Along the way, we drove by a massive solar panel installation and heard from locals in the area about the UAE government's environmental policy. They told us that the government was going to start focusing on hybrid vehicle sales. With force of pride, they said, *"The UAE is a trendsetter in the six GCC countries."*

We continued on, driving into the desert for the first time since Oman. The sand here has a different quality than Oman's desert. We were told that many Land Cruiser enthusiasts spend their weekends driving around here. The Land Cruiser that was leading our caravan got stuck twice in the sand. We had intentionally chosen a difficult route, which ended up giving quite a

shock to the driver, Katsuhiko Takagi of the Advanced Vehicle Engineering Development Division, who holds an S2-class Toyota Japan internal test track license. While off-roading is not his specialty, he expressed feeling frustrated at finding his skills lacking. How much frustration does he feel in his daily work? Meanwhile Hiroki Maeda, who is stationed at the Bahrain Representative Office as part of his training, holds a mid-level driving qualification but described driving in the desert as *"fun"* and had a look of satisfaction on his face. Has he been gradually getting a handle on how people drive in the GCC? He says that once you get a feel for the driving, however, you start to focus on the diversity of driving styles.

"Going to the extreme, each person has their own idea of what they want in a car. This makes sense obviously, but once you really internalize this, you start to question things. I've become aware

of a lot of things I had never even thought about in Japan, and that has made me question aspects of what the definition of a 'good car' is. I think this Drive Project will keep me thinking about this."

The finish line is the starting point of a "new everyday."

On the last day, we drove up a winding road on the highest mountain in the UAE. The flawlessness of the paved road showed just how



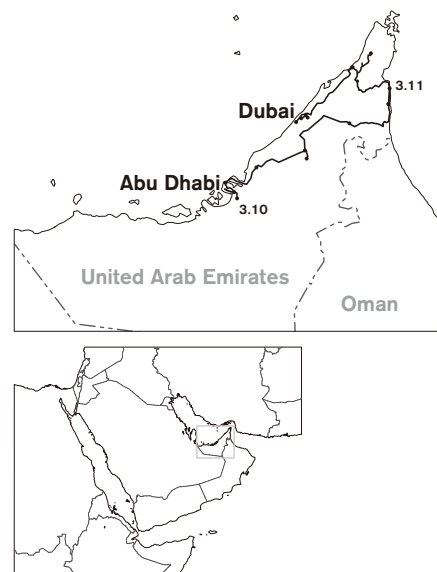
developed the UAE is. As we drove the cars to the finish line in Dubai, the number of lanes on the road increased and became filled with cars. Driving past a cluster of skyscrapers, we were surrounded not by rough-and-tough Land Cruisers and Hiluxes, but by luxury cars.

After the drive, Kan Suzuki from the Advanced Vehicle Engineering Development Division, who served as team captain, looked relieved while he recalled the people he met in the six GCC countries.

“From distributors to dealers in rural areas who handle Toyotas, they all have really strong feelings. Even when we were driving deep

into the mountains, we’d see billboards for Toyotas. Seeing them certainly made me happy—it was heartwarming. So we have to make cars designed for the Middle East for these people. I definitely had many more minor realizations in this drive, but most of all I’m glad I was able to experience their passion.”

Suzuki says that the finish line is the starting point, in the sense that we can bring a renewed outlook to our everyday. The end is the beginning. The members who finished this leg of the Drive Project should now see their everyday tasks in a new and different light as they restart their work in Japan.



Distance: 734km
Duration: March 9-11, 2019
Days: 3 days
Vehicles: Land Cruiser 200, Hilux, Fortuner, FJ Cruiser, Mirai, Prius PHV, Camry HEV

