



Yangon → Chiang Mai

Driving fueled by joy

The team went to see the Thilawa Special Economic Zone that was established in 2014 on the southern outskirts of Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar. Toyota plans to produce the Hilux here when its new plant starts operations in 2021. Osamu Yaoita of the Advanced Vehicle Engineering Development Division, who is serving as vice captain, has led the Drive Project members together with the captain. The mild-mannered Yaoita urged the team members to manage their health before the Drive Project began, and thanks in part to this, no one became seriously ill in the first

half of the drive. *“I felt a lot of pressure serving as vice captain. But I think I grew personally during the Drive Project too. I’m over sixty years old, but people can still grow no matter how old they are,”* he says with a gratified laugh. Yaoita drove the car, fueled by his joy. After being seen off by two Toyota dealerships, the team headed for the capital of Naypyitaw. Hideyuki Kasamatsu of the Advanced Vehicle Engineering Development Division asked his teammates about questions that bothered him on the Drive Project and had discussions inside the car. This process resulted in some realizations. *“I’m in the Vibration Testing Section, so vibration is something I think about.*

But in the Myanmar market where the majority of cars are used imports, I don’t think a lot of people know about the performance or comfort of new cars. With the current situation, we should be thinking about driving and braking performance more than vibration.”



Kasamatsu had previously requested to participate in the 5 Continents Drive Project and had finally gotten his wish. *“The Asian Drive Project has nourished me. I hear a lot of stories from around the world at work, but this experience has been big. People listen to you more if you’ve actually done the driving. I want to take this experience in Asia back to my workplace.”* What kind of demands will the people who live in India and Myanmar make of cars when their economies transition to the next phase? The collection of questions and realizations that Kasamatsu and his teammates build should help reveal the answers.

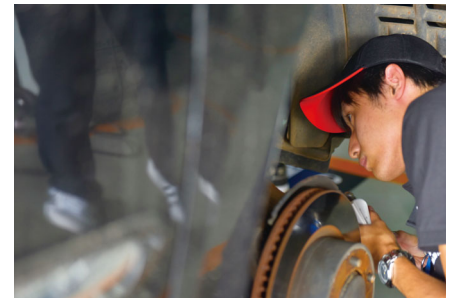
Drive just feeling the roads

The team drove from Naypyitaw to Mandalay. Government organizations are concentrated in central Naypyitaw, and the road in front of the Union Parliament building is 10 lanes just in one direction. When I asked Yoshimi Goto of the Advanced Vehicle Engineering Development Division what the Asian Drive Project meant to him, he said, *“It’s all about the experience of driving on*

the roads.” He continued, *“Roads train people, and people build cars’ is something President Akio Toyoda says, and it’s exactly that. Experiences stay with you more than words. I want to learn from the roads, drive them, and then connect this to making future cars.”* Goto previously worked in driver education. He observes his surroundings with a cool head and drives quite carefully. And then when he needs to, he gets the car to respond forcefully. When asked again about the keys to driving on roads in Asia, Goto replied that the basics are no different than regular driving. *“You don’t need to feel nervous in a weird way. What you want is to have a wide field of vision, and at the same time, calmly feel the tires making contact with the road. If you drive understanding the road’s condition, you should be able to understand the road. I want people to take back what they’ve each felt from the roads.”*

Takuya Tajika of the Service Management Division supported repairs at 70 dealers across six U.S. states from his base in Colorado for five years. Tajika had the opportunity to ask about customer feedback at dealers in Myanmar. *“What I felt from talking to them was the importance of trust*

and aftercare. People were happy, saying ‘After they sell the car people stop caring about you, but Toyota has good after-sales service.’ In addition to fast and inexpensive (repairs and other service), people want to have courteous and accurate service.” But in a place like this with so many used cars available in the market, there are big hurdles to selling new cars. The customers whose feedback he heard were part of the affluent class, but even they had driven used cars until a few years ago. *“When doing repairs, sometimes people choose used parts, and it drives home how we need to have flexibility, for example, a six-months Toyota parts warranty.”* Tajika used to talk to mechanics a lot when he was in the United States. *“If you expect ‘cheap and fast’ service too much, it*



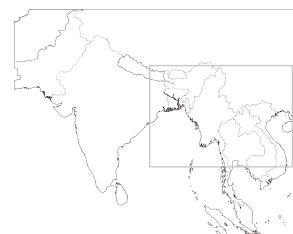


puts a lot on the mechanics. By improving serviceability, we can shorten the work time, lower costs, and reduce the workload at the genba. In the future, we need to make cars that make everyone who works with cars happy.” Tajika was dreaming about future Toyota cars as he watched mechanics work in Mandalay.

Realizations from riding in the same car

On October 4, the Drive Project members arrived in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. They prepared the cars at a dealer and went to a departure ceremony at the Chiang Mai 700 Year Stadium. Entering Thailand, Keng Wongputorn of Vehicle Performance Engineering, Toyota Daihatsu Engineering & Manufacturing Co., Ltd. (TDEM), felt added responsibility driving in his native country. *“In this Drive Project, members with various backgrounds talk while riding in the same car. This has given us the opportunity to talk to each other about*

how Thai people think and how Japanese people think.” If team members didn’t ride and drive together in the cars, some things would be difficult to share. *“Thai people don’t really mind sounds at low frequencies, but they don’t like high frequencies. This is something we can learn from riding in the same car with each other. The Drive Project members all have specializations in many different fields. I have been able to build a lot of friendships and have expanded my own knowledge too.”* The Drive Project members include 17 Japanese participants. What does Keng want them to learn from Thai roads? *“Thai people drive fast. They don’t even use engine braking going downhill on mountain roads. (laughs) I want them to take back to Japan things that they have to see with their own eyes to understand. Then after the Drive Project is over, I want them to come back on vacation. Thailand is a beautiful country after all.”* At the beginning of next week, the Drive Project members depart for Bangkok.



Distance: 760km
 Duration: September 30-October 4, 2019
 Days: 5 days
 Vehicles: Land Cruiser 200, Hilux Double Cab, Prado, Rush, Fortuner, Vios, Corolla Altis HV, Yaris Ativ, C-HR, Innova, Camry HV, Sienta