



Masvingo → Johannesburg

Across the national border to South Africa

The amount of material used to pave the straight road from inside Zimbabwe to the border must have been the absolute minimum necessary. The material was laid on top of soft ground that is sand in the dry season and mud in the rainy season, so when trucks drive over the road it bends under their weight and erodes, the edges getting scraped away. At times there would be a height difference with the shoulder that actually felt dangerous. Once across the border into South

Africa, however, the conditions changed completely. The team members could not help but notice the impact that the economy had on a country's infrastructure. Aso, who has spent the last year in Johannesburg assigned to the Africa Division, talked about the significance of this leg of the Drive Project while driving on roads that he had grown accustomed to.

"In the past, we would often look at catalog specs to decide which cars were suitable for Africa. Driving and comparing competitors' cars like this while hearing about car performance from experienced colleagues

allows me to understand what, say, that customer meant when they were talking about acceleration. All the team members are my teachers. This is the best environment I could hope for."

Aso says this is the time to be



planting seeds in Africa. How can Toyota accurately take in what the local needs are? The experiences gained driving in Zimbabwe and Botswana should bear fruit at some point.

What cars are suitable for Africa?

“This road goes on for two thousand kilometers all the way to Cape Town,” says Michael from TSAM. Just as he says, the road extends like a straight line drawn through the land. Lining the road are sugar cane fields and fields where lions are bred for hunting. The horizon line is always visible. Sekiya from the Advanced Technical Skills Institute explains the importance of driving straight while touching on the lack of driving skill of the West African team members.

“I think their perception must be similar to the perception of ordinary customers. They’re not used to driving, so they’ll suddenly twist the steering wheel and they focus in the near distance and all over the place. If Africa becomes motorized, you’re going to see a lot of drivers like them suddenly on the road. And to be honest, the roads of Africa are dangerous. Some people have no qualms about cutting across a highway, and there are lots of animals on the shoulder of the road. Even though there are a lot of potholes, people drive fast. As we’re driving, I’m thinking about what car settings are needed when that time comes.”

Even the Hilux, which made its passengers quite fatigued on bumpy, poorly maintained roads, was not a problem at all on the well-maintained roads of South Africa, including the steering and suspension settings.

Cars with good lineage

A car’s settings change its “flavor.” Atsumi, who works in the CV Vehicle Evaluation & Engineering Division where he develops the platform that forms the base of this “flavor,” spent his time in the Drive Project systematically asking team members for their opinions. He had this to say as he drove a slow 50 kph inside Kruger National Park while animals appeared from time to time and caught his eye.





“We talk about cars having good lineage, but ultimately if the base is not good neither is the car. Driving on Africa’s roads has reaffirmed this for me. After asking everyone their opinions about driving performance, noise and interior convenience, I get the sense that creating a good base at an inexpensive price is what will be needed in Africa in the coming years.”

His observation sounds like going back to the basics. There is no escaping from a simple answer, so he can’t give a clear and concise conclusion. Or, maybe it is a sense of mission he has gained after driving in Africa. Once this is in his head, he can’t help but continue mulling it over and thinking it through. This is what Atsumi has gained from the Drive Project.

What they learned was Africa’s diversity

On the last day, the team finished driving over 300 km of highway to reach TSAM in Johannesburg. Team

1’s Drive Project leg lasted about a month and ended in fitting African fashion with boisterous shouts of joy and the rhythm of African drums. In his speech, team captain Bundo emphasized the importance of the local team members. There were members from TSAM of course, and also from Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe in East Africa as well as from other parts of Africa like Congo and Côte d’Ivoire. According to Bundo, their help was a big reason why the team was able to complete their leg safely.

The slogan *“One Team, One Heart, Africa”* actually expresses the rich diversity of Africa. Precisely because Africa is so different, it must come together as one. The Drive Project team members talked late into the night about what their leg cutting across East Africa taught them about the differences between the countries and about the future of cars in Africa.



Distance: 1,352km
Duration: September 17-20, 2018
Days: 4 days
Vehicles: Fortuner, Land Cruiser 200, Hilux Double Cab, Land Cruiser 79 Double Cab, Land Cruiser Prado