

Listening to local voices

The team headed to Mossel Bay in Western Cape Province via the southernmost tip of Africa. Something had been bothering Hiroaki Ikawa from the Vehicle Engineering Development Division since he came to South Africa. “Locals use their car air conditioner in fresh air mode. They don’t like recirculation mode.” Recirculation mode creates negative pressure that causes fine dust kicked up by the car to enter the interior from the doors. “Even if we increase our costs to add auto mode, it doesn’t get used in some regions due to this

interior dust issue. If we conduct detailed research on local needs, we should be able to deliver reasonably priced cars that preserve their quality.”

The team headed to the seaside town of Port Elizabeth. When asked his thoughts about the video of Team 1’s Drive Project leg, Eigo Morimoto of the Engine Design and Engineering Division said, “It was like they were really driving in Africa. It’s different from here in South Africa, where the roads are well maintained. But these nice roads are also part of ‘real Africa’ today. We have to update the image of Africa we have in our minds.” The roads of South Africa are maintained and improved like the roads in

Europe and Japan, so driving on them was not a stressful experience. Morimoto thinks that the scale is the big difference. South Africa’s roads are on a scale that cannot be reproduced on a test track. What can be done about this? “People who’ve actually been here should be able to create better evaluation methods for the current conditions. At least they can speak up.” Morimoto can shape the thinking and assumptions of his co-workers in Japan based on the real Africa that he has seen. The team arrived at their destination in late afternoon.

The next morning, they crossed a ridge on their way to the interior town of Graaff-Reinet. Hideki Furuta of the

Stellenbosch → Bloemfontein





Production Team Member Development Department said it was refreshing to exchange ideas with the members after the day's drive, perhaps a sign of his work in human resources. *"If I can increase the motivation to make cars in the students I work with at the Toyota Technical Skills Academy before they graduate and move out to various areas, it will surely make their workplaces stronger. I want to put what I see in Africa and the things we talk about into my lessons and communicate them to the students."* It's not only the people who work directly with the cars that make the cars. The

look in Furuta's eyes and his words clearly conveyed this truth.

One day sitting in the seat of a Toyota

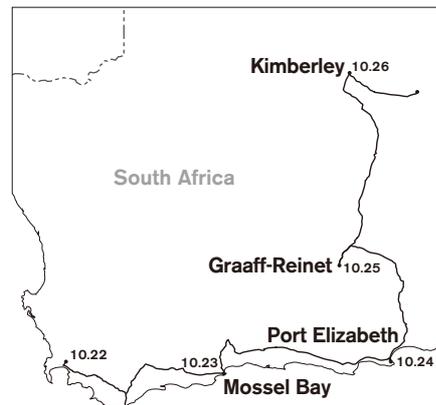
Team 2a had been in Africa for more than three weeks. Asked if he was tired yet, Yoichi Takahashi of the Vehicle Engineering Development Division says, *"The Project Drive route has been planned out well. We're getting a lot of support in terms of security and much else. I'm plenty comfortable, but I can't stop thinking about how many people in*

this country live a very hard life." Takahashi cannot forget the reality of Africa. He asked the TSAM members how people liked the seats he is currently developing. When they said that the seats don't cause fatigue and that customers had no complaints about them, a look of disappointment crossed his face. He was expecting more critical feedback. *"You can't just use your own assumptions or experience and knowledge to decide how things are. I feel like I can't forget the principle of Genchi Genbutsu."* A local dealer told Takahashi that what customers wanted was a car with good cost performance. *"There are more*

European cars, and Chinese-made cars are catching up too. You have to look to the future in development. I've seen a lot of people walking long distances. I'd like to make cars that are more accessible for them." Takahashi's thoughts turn to the people who face a harsh reality. He believes that the day will come when they can sit in the seat of a Toyota car.

On the outskirts of Bloemfontein, the team got to ride in a Hilux that had been modified to Dakar Rally specs. Asked for his opinion, Masashi Asano of the Body Design Division commented that it was a pity. Instead of talking about rally cars, however, he started talking about the cars on the streets. "There are a lot of Hilux and Land Cruisers in South Africa, and I can sense firsthand the trust that people have in them. But when we go into cities, I see compact Volkswagen and Hyundai cars. There's a lot of traffic in urban areas, and the conditions are good enough for compact cars. Nevertheless, I don't see many Aygo or Yaris models. Volkswagen has established a good brand image, and Hyundai came in later with inexpensive prices. Toyota has built a good brand image with the Hilux and the Land

Cruiser, but it hasn't capitalized on this brand image. We need to better reflect local opinions in how we make cars and not fall into some fixed idea about Africa." When asked one more time about what he thought of riding in the rally car, he breaks out into a smile and says, "It reminded me of how it felt when I first started driving." When people experience good cars and how they feel, they can't help but smile. Asano gets a serious expression on his face when he talks about the reality on the ground in Africa, but that may be the building block for future smiles. After Team 2 rests up over the weekend, they will head to the Kingdom of Lesotho, the southernmost landlocked country in the world and surrounded by the Republic of South Africa.



Distance: 1,981km
 Duration: October 22-26, 2018
 Days: 5 days
 Vehicles: Fortuner, Land Cruiser 200, Hilux Double Cab, Land Cruiser 79 Double Cab, Land Cruiser Prado, Rav4, Corolla, Quest

