

Uyuni → Antofagasta



Power is needed in Salar de Uyuni, where people drive cars loaded with cargo.

“Oh, a Land Cruiser,” Miyazaki from the Vehicle Technology Development Division uttered, one of the countless times he said this while riding in a Drive Project car. He used to be involved in their development and has owned them too. So when he saw a Land Cruiser, he couldn’t help but get excited. Getting feedback this day from a Salar de Uyuni guide, who also had Land Cruisers, was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Miyazaki. It’s said that more than 90% of the cars driven out here are Land Cruisers. One of the reasons is their ability to drive on any type of road, including salt flats and sand. And there are more practical reasons as well, like the fact that it’s

easier to get spare parts for them than for other makes and models. When Miyazaki asked him what parts they needed to replace frequently, he said that he changed the shock absorbers and brake pads every three to four months. The guide often took people on 2-night, 3-day tours of Salar de Uyuni, with six people in the car and an additional 200 kg in cargo. This obviously creates more wear and tear on the underbody. When Miyazaki looked at the coil spring rear suspension system, he could see this too. He also got requests. The guide said that the old rigid coil spring suspension did a better job than the current independent suspension system in keeping the undercarriage from scraping the road while driving. The Land Cruiser has evolved in step with pass-by noise and environmental regulations, but customers see the old Land Cruiser models before their eyes. Miyazaki says, “The Land Cruiser’s

enemy is the Land Cruiser. It’s a car with no end.” What is he taking back to Japan with him?

The Atacama Desert necessitates driving performance you can trust with your life.

If one of the Five Continents Drive Project teams were to drive on Mars, the landscape might not be much different than here. The average elevation on the drive in the Atacama Desert is 2,000 m. It’s said to be the driest place on earth, and countries have recently been building observatories here. One of them is the University of Tokyo Atacama Observatory (TAO), located 5,640 m above sea level at the summit of Cerro Chanjnantor. On the advice of



University of Tokyo researchers, the drive team took the safety precautions of bringing oxygen tanks with them and changing to a Hilux with a roll bar attached as they neared the summit.

The day before they departed for the observatory, Professor Yuzuru Yoshii, who heads the TAO Project, had this to say. "Toyota cars were our lifeline as we drove around uncharted areas searching for candidate observatory sites, and they still are. They are one member of the TAO team." The researchers usually use rental cars locally. Toyotas are the only make they trust at altitudes of more than 5,000 m, and they often use Hiluxes and 4Runners. Adding evidence to this was the fact that the drive team's RAV4 got stuck climbing up the mountain, possibly from the combination of the high altitude and the steep slope. Adachi, the sub-captain of the team, said it was the first time he had seen a car just give up. It is frightening to think about what would have happened if the team had been suffering from altitude sickness and driving at night.

After going down the mountain, Professor Yoshii smiled as he said, "How was that? Please remember that you have end users up here too." His words stuck with the team and reaffirmed in their minds their mission of needing to build ever-better cars.

Day and night, Hiluxes drive back and forth at one of the largest copper mines in the world.

The team's mission is to drive, and they learn a lot as they make the cars perform. But there are a lot of things to be learned off the roads as well. Sugiura, Group manager of the Latin America Division, came to support the team the day before their ascent to TAO. She told them "First, I want you to fall in love with South America." She believes that if the team is motivated to work for the people of South America, they will be better able to build ever-better cars. Drive team leader Tatematsu, who visited Escondida, the site of one of the largest copper-producing mines in the world, thanked the laborers there as he digested another facet of the Drive Project. They use 310 Hiluxes there. And they put their trust in



Toyotas. Tatematsu said, "It made me proud to hear that, compared to other models, the Hilux has a rigid enough body that it doesn't need to have a roll bar attached." He was, however, concerned to hear about problems caused by the sticky, gummy soil texture. "I don't think we can fix it right away. But I hope that by communicating my heartfelt appreciation, they will feel better about the routine maintenance they have to do." Tatematsu went on to comment on how every local person he met was special, and how the Drive Project was not just about driving.

In this one week, the team saw people use cars in ways inconceivable in Japan. Team 2 has just a little more time to experience *genchi genbutsu* and gain valuable insights from it.

Reporter ○ Toshiya Muraoka



Distance: 1,204km
 Duration: October.10-October.15, 2016
 Days: 6days
 Vehicles: LC200, Hilux Wcab, SW4/Fortuner, RAV4 4X4, Prius, Hilux Wcab, LX, Prado, LC70, Hiace, 4Runner, Tundra, Tacoma