

San Rafael → Salta



Slick roads after the rain create treacherous driving conditions.

A new week begins. The vehicles get checked out at a dealer in San Rafael in the morning. The new team members also get a chance to learn the daily routine and how things are done. In light of the upcoming driving, all the vehicles this time are 4WD. Yagi, a new group leader, says it's his first time driving in South America. "I'm both nervous and excited about it. We have new team members, and I hope each of them makes their own discoveries and fully demonstrates their abilities," he comments.

The team experienced their worst road conditions yet on the way to Mendoza. The pleasant weather two days ago had turned to rain the day before. Even though the rain had stopped, the dirt

roads, which had been marked by dust clouds, were now dotted with puddles. The hills were steep and slippery, and the drivers had to stay on their guard. They managed to avoid major accidents and safely reached the city of Mendoza. The breeze was a little cool, but the streets were filled with lush vegetation. The team felt like they had left Patagonia and entered a cultural landmark.

Feeling roads that are only found on a big continent.

At the debriefing meeting the night they arrived in Mendoza, Masahiro Terada, who is acting as the special stage producer, explained the next day's program.

"As a special stage, I've planned a

dirt road and a road that's a dry riverbed that are used in the Dakar Rally. These roads are unique to this continent and I want you to have fun on them. Tomorrow you won't be driving only in a caravan, you'll also be driving the vehicles solo. Passengers in the vehicles will navigate with maps, and I want all of you to have the sense that you are driving. While you're driving, I hope you can change up your speed and get a firsthand feel for the differences when you give the engine power."

The weather was clear the next day. The team drove north for about two hours and reached the special stage course. Rogelio and Julio from the Overseas Service Technology Division were riding in the cars. The driving itself—how to approach the course, the handling, speeding up and slowing down—was satisfying. Uemoto from the Mold Production Technology Division, who was driving one of the cars, asked Rogelio and Julio if they



had any advice for him about his driving.

Rogelio replied, "Don't make minor corrections in handling. Check the lines often. But most important, have fun!"

Getting valuable feedback from customers.

Argentina's National Route 40 (RN40), the week's main driving route, is loved and revered in much the same way Route 66 is in the United States. The team drove from Villa Unión, a town that serves as a stop for travelers on RN40, to Cafayate. The landscape changed, and you could see that it was snowing in the Andes. The national route straddles provinces and is in excellent condition here. According to the crew from TASA, a government initiative is prioritizing development of northern Argentina. The weather is mild, and the population is denser than in southern Argentina. The team drives through more towns and villages.

The next day, the team first visits a dealer in Salta. They receive a warm welcome from all the employees, who come out to greet them bearing a Five Continents Drive banner. Then the team sits down to talk to four customers who drive IMVs in their work running farms and ranches. The customers give the IMV high marks for its engine performance and after-care service, but the feedback about its stiff suspension on rough roads is pointed. The suspension prompted one of the customers to

switch one of his vehicles from a Hilux to a VW Amarok. The meeting gave the TMC and TASA team members one direction for future development.

After leaving Salta, the team headed for Pumamarca, which was their northernmost destination in Argentina. Pumamarca has an elevation of 2,500 m above sea level and is known for its scenic beauty. The mountain road stretched out before them, adding gradations of green, white, black, red, and brown the further they went. General Manager Otsuka from MS Company, who was participating in the drive this week, shared his thoughts while admiring the scenery.

"How do we compete with European makes? I've been able to talk with the TASA team members and identify points for improvement. I plan to refine things little by little, including my approach to R&D," he said.

Looking for the romance in car making.

With a maximum elevation of 4,170 m, it was Team 3's turn to drive on paved and dirt roads in the highlands on the South American leg of the Five Continents Drive Project. Ueno, who works in Testing Division for all TOYOTA's vehicles and possesses an S2, the highest driving qualification at Toyota, was driving aboard a RAV4. He said that he didn't have a pleasant drive, between the torque and gear-shifting at low speeds when going uphill, and the off-kilter engine braking when downshifting on the

downhill side. Meanwhile Saito, who works in the MS Vehicle Testing Division and was driving an SW4 (Fortuner), said that the SW4 was fun to drive and showed the same performance as it did at low elevations. Saito also described his rather unique Drive Project goal.

"Before I left for the Drive Project, I decided that I wanted to get a sense of romance about cars. It's difficult to feel the romance when you're pressed for time and doing highly technical work. But out in an environment free from these pressures, you feel glad you own a car after a satisfying drive. I want to capture this romance not only when I'm driving, but when I'm making cars too," he said.

Some of the team members fell slightly ill while driving at the high elevations, but they recovered by the time the team returned to Salta. The drive had provided a bountiful harvest of food for thought.

It is almost time for the South American leg of the Five Continents Drive Project to come to an end. The team members have their sights set on a bright, romance-filled future for cars, with their own development aspirations providing the motivation to move forward.

Reporter ○ Rui Shimamoto



Distance: 2,180km
 Duration: November.21-
 November.25, 2016
 Days: 5days
 Vehicles: LC200,
 Hilux Wcab,
 SW4/Fortuner, RAV4 4X4,
 Hilux Scab w/canopy