

Breakdowns and Highway Companions

October 24, 2017



HOUGHTON, Mich. (October 24, 2017) – When Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) R&D Executive Vice President Shinichi Yasui learned that a group of engineers, technicians and other Toyota team members compete in Rally America competitions, he was intrigued. When he found out they were racing in a Corolla iM, for which he had been chief engineer, he decided this was something he needed to see for himself. So, he and two other R&D executives accompanied the Toyota R&D Rally Team to the Lake Superior Performance Rally (LSPR) in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula last weekend. The Rally America event, which takes place among the woods and wildflowers along U.S. 41, is among the most challenging events on the rally schedule.

EVP Yasui, Body Design Vice President Dave Sawin and Executive Project Manager Dave Baxter came up to support the team and learn about the sport. They also ended up get some hands-on rally experience, including hot laps as co-drivers, time behind the wheel and getting their hands dirty by helping during a service stop for the iM.

“Talking with the team about how they’d adapted iM for stage rally was very exciting, as was having the opportunity to drive the modified version of the car I’d spent so much time developing,” said Yasui. “Seeing iM racing competitively against so many impressive cars and being a part of their team for the day,” continued Yasui, “gave me deeper appreciation of their dedication to not only racing, but engineering and problem solving as well.”

Body Design VP Sawin echoed Yasui’s sentiments: “Whether it is their rally cars or the cars they’re developing in Michigan for North American and global markets, these engineers are truly committed to achieving a top product.”

Committed as they were, the stages of LSPR proved a bit more challenging for the team this season. A tricky surface on stage three retired the Ravenscroft/Steinkamp All-Trac to the trailer. After finishing Day One just over ten seconds behind Ryan Millen’s Toyota Motorsports Rav4, the iM, piloted by Alex Ribner and Brad Legris, had an engine problem surface not long after dark that proved too complicated to fix in the field. While disappointed that neither team was able to complete the rally, the team is far from square one.

“We’re all frustrated that we didn’t get the results we wanted this time” said driver Colin Ravenscroft “but we learned a lot. We got some great support and feedback from our executives, especially from EVP Yasui regarding the iM. Looking down the line, we’re excited to get the improvements made and be ready to go make some noise at the start of next season. The waiting is the hardest part.”

LSPR was the final event of the 2017 season, but the downtime won’t last long. The TMNA Rally Team is planning to kick-off the 2018 season at Missouri’s Rally in the 100 Acre Wood in February, 2018.