

#iMfast: Leaving the Desk in the Dust

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Ann Arbor, Mich. (October 19, 2016) – When it comes to developing parts and systems for tomorrow’s cars and trucks, engineers at Toyota’s North American R&D headquarters in Southeast Michigan spend a lot of time at their desks crunching data, working on CAD images and doing some of the less glamorous work that goes into making ever better cars. Some of that work, however, is far from ho-hum and far from the desk.

For the past several years, Toyota Technical Center team members have exercised their engineering and driving skills by taking production Toyota vehicles and competing in regional SCCA and Rally America events. These competitions not only offer a nice break from the office, they also allow the team to test part design ideas and experiment in ways the confines of the lab and standard test track don’t allow. Their current racer, a 2016 Corolla iM, is probably the best example.

“We’ve been working on the suspension for the rally iM for the past several months,” said Toyota engineer, rally driver and crew chief Kyle Steinkamp. “It started out of necessity. The stock suspension in the iM wasn’t designed to survive the rigors of rally racing. With the design changes we’ve made and the lessons we’ve learned this season, we’ve moved past simply surviving a race to the point that TRD (Toyota Racing Development) has shown interest in our work.”

The team most recently competed as a regional entry in the Lake Superior Performance Rally (LSPR), the final

event in the Rally America 2016 season. It was the team's third consecutive appearance in the event and their 4th in-class (regional) / 16th over-all finish was their best showing so far for the Northern Michigan event.

Driver/co-driver Colin Ravenscroft was happy with the iM's improved performance. "While there's always room for improvement, we're excited by the progress the iM has made and how well it performed at LSPR," said Ravenscroft." It certainly wasn't the fastest car on the course, but with the changes we've made, it's becoming increasingly competitive."

While the work on improving the iM is far from over, Brian Thurgate the other driver / co-driver for the LSPR event is looking toward the future. "As our team grows, we'd like to expand to two vehicles — the iM and something a little more aggressive like the new TRD Pro Tacoma."

Time will tell if a Tacoma will be tearing up the rally stages in the near future, but in the meantime if you notice a little more pep in your Toyota vehicle, you may just have some rally-racing engineers to thank.