

Getting Back Up: Toyota Donates RAV4 Hybrid to Veteran Who Stands Tall

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NEW YORK – Army Sergeant First Class Jeffrey Hackett knew the house he and his fellow soldiers were trying to clear on Aug. 15, 2011, in Afghanistan could be occupied by the Taliban and armed with improvised explosive devices. He knew exactly what the wire sticking out of the ground meant and immediately turned around, but it was too late.

“The IED went off and the explosion threw me and then I hit the ground,” Hackett remembers. “At this point I thought I was just knocked down, pulled down my vest off my face attempted to get up, but I could not.”

Hackett lost his right leg and suffered serious injuries all over his body due to the blast. He was later diagnosed with PTSD. With help from his family and community, Hackett got back up.

Toyota and the New York International Auto Show joined forces to celebrate and honor Hackett, of Mexico, N.Y. On Saturday, March 26, Toyota donated a 2016 Toyota RAV4 Hybrid to Hackett during the auto show’s opening ceremony, which was staged at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo presented Hackett with his new keys.

The Bussani Mobility Team of Bethpage, N.Y., outfitted Hackett's new ride with a special steering controls as well as pedals that can all be used with a left foot. Toyota Financial Services also provided Hackett with its Platinum Toyota Extra Care Vehicle Service Agreement, which expands coverage for his RAV4 Hybrid for up to 6 years or 100,000 miles.

Also present during the auto show ceremony was another war hero, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Dakota Meyer. Meyer, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, has worked extensively with Toyota and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on the Hiring Our Heroes program.

"Sgt. First Class Hackett and his family embody service and sacrifice and determination," said Toyota Vehicle Operations Manager Jason Keller. "We are thankful for the service and sacrifice of veterans like him."

"It is a great honor to work with Toyota to provide Sgt. First Class Hackett and his family with a new vehicle," said Bob Vail, chairman of the Greater New York Automobile Dealers Association. "We are truly grateful for his service and for all of our soldiers and veterans who have kept us safe."

Hackett was medically retired from the U.S. Army in August 2013 after 19 years of service, which saw him serve two tours in Afghanistan and deployments around the world in places like Haiti, Kosovo and Panama. He earned more than a dozen awards, including the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal and Purple Heart.

The married father of three had to adjust to big changes after returning home an amputee. Living in a home not built for wheelchair use, the simplest chores turned into daunting tasks, but with help from his family, Hackett adapted and overcame obstacles.

"I let nothing stop me – if presented I will try it – and if I cannot do it the first time, I will find a way to do it," Hackett said. "The fight is never over for veterans, regardless of the job they held during active duty. It has just begun."