

He's Weird, Right?

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New Scion boss Andrew Gilleland might be the perfect person to take over Toyota's youth brand.

In conversation, the newly appointed vice president of Scion easily displays a mixture of humor, causal approachability and an incredible depth of industry knowledge.

Gilleland began working at Toyota in 1993. Since then, he has moved 11 times for work, including stints as general manager of the Central Atlantic Region and assistant general manager of the Cincinnati Region.

But if you're a pro wrestling fan, the first thing you notice as you walk into Gilleland's office at Scion headquarters in Torrance, Calif., is an autographed photo of the famed "Nature Boy" Ric Flair.

"If someone walks in and notices that picture, I know who I'm dealing with," he says. "I race motorcycles and do track days whenever I can, and one of my helmets, one side is Albert Einstein – the picture of him with his tongue sticking out and it's in black and white, a Salvador Dali kinda deal – and the other side is Ric Flair. It's my dichotomy of man."

Yep, this guy understands excitement.

So you're a Ric Flair guy?

Ric Flair is the man! Everyone who has come after him has modeled Ric Flair. In the 1980s, when I was a kid in North Carolina, that's what we watched. Think about it, there were no pro sports at that time. You could go see some college basketball, but pro wrestling was something everybody was into.

In your first two months at Scion, sales are up quite a bit. How are the iA and iM resonating with customers?

The first lesson is that product is king. And this is obviously an example of the right products for the right customers. We have to be careful because we're just two months into it, but the initial reaction to both products has been really good, especially iA because of the content and the safety features.

What we're finding with millennials is they're more pragmatic and they are looking for value, but they still want something that's fun and a little different. The iA is a great example of that. The iM is doing well. But the two of them combined, wow.

So why do you think these are so popular?

Everything we do is with an eye on being more emotionally driven with design. The iM especially shows that with the 17-inch wheels and the body kit. You get in the car and drive it and it feels like a small luxury vehicle. That's the other thing we've learned about our customers. They want high content and smaller cars at a reasonable price. Both iA and iM hit the market just right. They're fun, they're exciting, and they've got a lot of features young people are looking for in terms of technology and safety.

Let's talk about the C-HR concept. Is that what it will look like when it goes to production?

It'll be very similar. Not exact but pretty close. It's hard to define. It has a lot of features like an SUV, but it's not an SUV. It's gonna drive and handle like a car, but it's not a car. And it's built on Toyota New Global Architecture (TGNA). We're trying not to define it in a particular segment. It will be interesting to see what customers think of that vehicle.

Are you worried it will be too weird?

No. Our customers are still saying polarizing is okay. For younger people, I think they want something that stands out a little bit. This is a great car for someone in an urban environment. You can get around downtown, it's not too big and it's got great fuel economy. But it has plenty of utility and seating for five. It kind of fits the bill for young urban creatives. It's the perfect car for someone in an urban area who wants reliable transportation and wants to stand out a little bit.

This is the kind of car that is going to define what Scion is. We have an ad campaign: "Weird, Right?" It's not weird as in strange, it's weird as in, "I never thought of that." It's surprising, it's different and I think the C-HR is absolutely going to resonate with that group of people.

What does success look like for Scion?

I'm a sales guy so I'm gonna tell you sales volume. But I think ultimately success is bringing new customers into Scion and the Toyota and Lexus brands. We know that 70 percent of Scion customers are new to Toyota. Ten years ago we were advertising to Gen X. They didn't trust big brands. They wanted to be different and they didn't want to buy Toyotas. Now we've transitioned to Gen Y and Z, which will be close to 100 million people. They're telling us they dig Scion because it *is* associated with Toyota.