

29. What's In An Auto Show?

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We know that many of you have attended an auto show in the past – some of you might even be regulars. And for those of you who have never been to one, you should definitely make a point of going sometime in the future. They are more relaxed, low-pressure environments to check out new vehicles. But whether you're an auto show enthusiast or a first-timer, you're in for a treat today because we have two great guests who are going to give you a behind the scenes view of what it takes to put on these exciting, fun-filled events: Tyler McBride, Toyota Auto Show Manager, and Jackie Henry, Lexus Auto Show Analyst.

Learn all about what goes into creating the Toyota and Lexus auto show experiences.

Full transcript below.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:00:00] Hi, everyone. It's Tyler. And welcome to the Toyota Untold Podcast. This episode is all about auto shows. And I'm sure many of you have attended an auto show in the past, and some of you might even be regulars. It's a great way to check out our vehicles. For those of you who have never been to one, you definitely should make it a point of going some time in the future. But whether you're an auto show enthusiast or a first timer, you're in for a treat today. We have two great guests who are going to give you a behind-the-scenes view of what it takes to put on these exciting, fun-filled events.

Now, please note that this interview was recorded prior to the COVID-19 crisis. The idea of venues packed with shoulder-to-shoulder attendees will no doubt sound completely out of place in our current environment. But even though so much changed since this interview, we still want to share what is a fascinating, engaging and informative conversation. Today, you'll hear one of our guests say, "Auto shows are always evolving."
[00:01:00] Little did we know how true those words would become. The truth is we're still in the process of figuring out what auto shows will look like in the months to come.

But it is important to know that Toyota is working hard to develop safety protocols to help protect our customers, team members, and business partners who attend these events. Things like increased sanitation measures and making adjustments to help adhere to social distancing guidelines. We're also working closely with an auto show organizer to ensure they implement proper protocols of their own. At Toyota, safety is paramount. And as we look forward to the upcoming auto show season, you can expect to see these protocols in place and evolving with the ever-changing COVID-19 environment. So, with that said, sit back, relax and enjoy as we delve into auto shows.

Hey, guys. It's Tyler. And welcome back to another episode of Toyota Untold.

Kelsey Soule: And this is Kelsey. And today, we're going to explore something that we know well, but maybe you don't, auto [00:02:00] shows.

Tyler Litchenberger: Kelsey, did you grow up going to auto shows?

Kelsey Soule: I had never been to an auto show until I worked here.

Tyler Litchenberger: Ditto.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Never, but they're like quite popular.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. And it's actually pretty informative for the average consumer. So, if you're into cars, you may have checked out an auto show before. If you haven't, they are giant, multi-day events in big cities where you can see current vehicle models, new models, concept cars, classics. It's a whole thing.

Tyler Litchenberger: It's a thing.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: And so, today, we have, not to be confused with me, but boy Tyler, Tyler McBride, Toyota Auto Show Manager, and Jackie Henry, Lexus Auto Show Analyst. Thank you for coming guys.

Kelsey Soule: Welcome to the podcast.

Jackie Henry: Hello.

Tyler McBride: Thank you. And you know that boy Tyler nickname and girl Tyler is actually one that's common here at Toyota and Lexus. Tyler and I do work together on a few things, so we are-

Tyler Litchenberger: It's confusing when we sit in meetings together because people are like, "Hey, Tyler," and we're like, "Huh?"

Tyler McBride: I like social media Tyler, or PR Tyler, or marketing Tyler or, you know. Anyway, but-

Tyler Litchenberger: Boy and girl is just easy.

Tyler McBride: I should say [00:03:00] where I sit at Toyota too, the social media team is right next to me. And they're always speaking really highly of Tyler. And I always think they're talking about me, but they're never talking about me.

Kelsey Soule: You know, you don't have to start like giving compliments just because we asked you to come on the podcast.

Tyler Litchenberger: Your 20 is coming, Tyler.

Kelsey Soule: Okay. So, just for the general, we want to start at the very basics of an auto show. So, I think everyone kind of gets the idea that there's a bunch of cars there, you can come look at them, they're for media and the consumer. But I think what people like don't know is the entire massive production that goes on behind it. And you guys are at the heart of that. So, I guess, we should start kind of at the beginning, like how far in advance do you have to plan a show? What goes into it?

Tyler Litchenberger: And what's the basic question? Like why? Why? Why do an auto show?

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler McBride: Yeah. Well, I mean, that's a great question. I mean, do people really care about auto shows? And they do. They do.

Kelsey Soule: Well, obviously, because we're doing this episode.

Tyler Litchenberger: I hope. You have a job.

Tyler McBride: No, they do. Actually, if you look at the numbers, there's about 11 million [00:04:00] people that attend auto shows annually.

Kelsey Soule: Wow.

Tyler McBride: And of those, a good portion are there to purchase. And when I say to purchase, they are looking for a low-pressure environment to check out cars, right? And then, ultimately, go to their respective dealers and make that purchase.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. And I think what a lot of people don't know is there's an auto show in almost every city. And they scale from these huge shows that what we've seen in LA, in New York, in Chicago, all the way down to some really small cities. So, it's a great opportunity as Tyler mentioned that anyone can go there in a no-

pressure environment to really cross-shop and see what's out there.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: It's a lot of auto makers in one small space that you can go and see.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Jackie Henry: And the beautiful thing is people are paying to come see us. So, we know for the most part, a lot of these people are in market, which is great for us.

Tyler McBride: This is the only event we do at Toyota or the only partnership where people actually pay money to look at our cars, you know, whether it's-

Tyler Litchenberger: That's crazy to think about.

Tyler McBride: Isn't that cool to think about that?

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, actually [crosstalk] .

Tyler McBride: I know. And some might argue, well, NASCAR, you know, they [00:05:00] see our cars, but that's not really. They're there to see the race, right? This is something where they pay their hard-earned money to see the all new Camry and compare it against some of our other competitors or look at it versus Avalon or a Lexus model, you know. So, we really take that to heart, the fact that people are here to see us. Let's create an experience that is true to Toyota and really makes the person to pay their hard-earned money to be there, feel rewarded, and thanks for being there.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. And going back to your question in terms of timing and planning, so on the Lexus side, we're in over 60 auto shows across the country. I think Toyota, you guys are in about 70. So, when we think about planning, we have what we call a season.

Tyler Litchenberger: Wait a minute, 60 auto shows in like 52 weeks?

Jackie Henry: We're seasonal.

Tyler Litchenberger: Potentially?

Jackie Henry: We're seasonal.

Tyler Litchenberger: Okay. All right.

Jackie Henry: So, we kind of treat it-

Tyler Litchenberger: So, shorter than 40, 52?

Jackie Henry: ... almost like it's like our own sports. So, during the auto show season, which is usually about October through April, is when we've got all of these shows going on. So, we [00:06:00] have a master calendar that we keep. And in January and February, those are our crazy months. And you may have 10 auto shows going on at the same weekend.

Tyler Litchenberger: Wow!

Jackie Henry: So, it's kind of crazy. We try to be in multiple places at one time, but ultimately, it's impossible. But our planning typically starts at least a year out. Sometimes, a year or six months, depending on the size of the show. So, there's a lot that goes into it.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. And so, you were talking a little bit about the experience. So, obviously, we don't just park cars in a big convention center and say, "Hey, come look."

Tyler Litchenberger: Or do we?

Tyler McBride: We don't. We avoid cars on carpet, as we call it.

Tyler Litchenberger: Cars on carpet.

Kelsey Soule: Cars on carpet. I like it.

Tyler McBride: We want to create an experience around each vehicle. You know, really bring it to life.

Kelsey Soule: I mean, I think it would be interesting for people to know the thought that goes in behind that. So, like what are some experiences that people could see at an auto show that may influence them or, you know, may just be fun for them to come see.

Jackie Henry: I'm going to turn that over to you because you guys are like the carnival at the auto show. You've got so much crazy stuff going on.

Tyler Litchenberger: Luxury, I bet, [00:07:00] is different though, so I want to hear about that.

Jackie Henry: It's a little different.

Tyler McBride: In terms of what we do to bring vehicles to life and bring entertainment into this space, I mean, I'll give you one example. Prius, right? Prius has a loyal following, but at the same time, there's always room to grow that buyer or grow that market. And Prius all-wheel drive is coming out. And this is something that we've heard from for years, especially markets in Rocky Mountain West, Pacific Northwest, Northeast United States-

Tyler Litchenberger: Midwest, yeah.

Tyler McBride: ... "Hey, when is the Prius going to be all-wheel drive?" So, we launched that, and we launched it at Los Angeles at the auto show there during a press conference. And that was one of the big announcements that we made.

Tyler Litchenberger: In 2018, yeah.

Tyler McBride: In 2018 Los Angeles. And then, to really bring that aspect to life, we created this activation, if you will, around the Prius where you got to see the all new Prius and you're like, "Well, you know, it looks the same as the old Prius," but it has all-wheel drive. You can't just show that.

So, we created a green screen weather report [00:08:00] of sorts where any customer could walk up, they had a teleprompter in front of them, they were being recorded, and they could talk about this massive blizzard that

was taking place. And you saw penguins sliding around behind them, and you saw this walking snowman and the weather reporter was saying “No one’s out on the road.” And then, they go, “Oh, wait, there’s a Prius,” and you have a Prius in the background, you know, just taking on the streets.

And it was a fun, exciting way to showcase that now as an all-wheel drive. And then, of course, you could share that socially. You could send it to your friends. And it was just a great way.

Tyler Litchenberger: It’s really fun and good, yeah.

Tyler McBride: Great fun way to bring a car to life.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah. That’s awesome. So then, what’s it like on the luxury side because you guys have like a swag and sleekness to you.

Jackie Henry: Yeah, yeah. So, at least, for Lexus, we actually have global brand guidelines that Lexus International has all of our global distributors follow. So, as much as we want to run rogue, we do kind of need to stay within some parameters. So, ours is definitely modern, upscale luxury. And that’s what we try and [00:09:00] project, at least, for Lexus as a luxury lifestyle brand. So, you’ll see many contemporary finishes throughout our space, different hard surfaces, wood and marbles, things like that. But we’re also really trying to get individuals into the vehicles and make that a really dynamic, engaging experience as well.

So, we’ll take some of our connected technologies. For instance, we’ve got Apple CarPlay, Alexa. And we’ll try and bring those connected technologies into the vehicle to get people to experience them firsthand and create an engagement around that. So, we really try to connect the two within our space.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right. So, most people might not know that there’s like parts to auto shows, right? And where Kelsey and I have been, since we joined the company, is during the press days. So, auto shows usually start with press days, right? Or just some sort of opening. And then, press days where the media get to see whatever the unveiled car is, at least, at the bigger auto shows, there are press days. And then, it goes into consumer days, and that opens up, what are consumer days [00:10:00] like?

Tyler McBride: Well, if you’ve never experienced a consumer day or a public day, especially at some of these large auto shows, it’s quite the experience. Chicago gets over a million people over the course of, what is it? 13 days,

Jackie Henry: Like two weeks, yeah.

Tyler McBride: Again, I mean, as we mentioned earlier, it’s a low-pressure environment. It’s a fun environment, you know.

Jackie Henry: And just the audience that comes to the shows, it runs the gamut. You’ve got families, you’ve got younger teens, older people. I mean, we’re reaching everyone at these shows. So, it’s great.

Tyler Litchenberger: And how do you crowd-control that, or if people have questions, or they’re like, you know, shoulder-to-shoulder, but like, “Hey, I just want information,” how do we help them?

Jackie Henry: Yeah. So, we have teams of dedicated product specialists that really help to answer any of the product questions. For the major shows, we definitely plus up really heavy and try to put a ton of bodies on the floor. We also have wheel stands next to each vehicle that gives information because most times, every single product specialist is engaged in a conversation with someone.

Tyler McBride: We also [00:11:00] hire brand ambassadors as well to augment our staff, especially on those really crowded days. But, you know, people will walk by our space here at Toyota headquarters, and they see where the auto show team sits, right? And they say something to the effect of, “Are you telling me you’re at 73 auto shows plus managing consumer electronics show, NADA, SEMA, our national dealer meeting. And just this small team does it?” And truth is we are so grateful for our business partners, product specialists that really help us bring all these shows to life. And we really couldn’t do it without them.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. And we use a really large exhibit house that really helps to build and fabricate everything that you see on site. So, they help set it up, they tear it down, and they’ve got an army of people who help give us that coverage across the country. Especially to Tyler’s point, when we’ve got so many shows happening at the same time, we unfortunately can’t be at all of them.

Kelsey Soule: Right. I think it’s important for our listeners that haven’t been to kind of paint a picture of like how massive, because [00:12:00] like I said, because we go for the media ones, we go to the big ones. I know that there are smaller ones, but how massive a scale? And like what’s involved in literally the setup, teardown. I mean, walking-

Tyler Litchenberger: Selection of cars that’s going to be there?

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. Like walking into the New York auto show space, I mean, you see things hanging from the ceiling. There’s people in like certain luxury models like giving out free champagne. Like it’s like can you explain, I guess, more of the logistics side? I mean, just physically getting all those cars into one big space, like do all the doors open on the side and we just missed it or what?

Tyler McBride: Well, I should note too that the free champagne stops after your press day.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, oh. Oh, man.

Kelsey Soule: So, wait. Really?

Jackie Henry: Dang. Yeah, it does. From a logistic standpoint, we have what we call kits, like our display kits. So, for the big shows, that has a kit that is full of all of these different big elements and big properties that you see. And those typically go from the major shows from show, to show, [00:13:00] to show-

Kelsey Soule: Oh wow! So, you really-

Jackie Henry: And we ship them around the country. And then, you go to your smaller shows that aren’t super tiny, but some of the markets like San Francisco or Philadelphia, and those typically have a smaller kit, which has little less properties in them. And then, you’ve got even smaller shows that have their own kits. So, we create a schedule to make sure we route those kits throughout the country, and they literally will travel show to show. So, from a display standpoint, that’s how we kind of work it.

Now, in terms of cars, I’m not sure how Tyler handles it, but on the Lexus side, we identify basically our top priority vehicles in a certain order in which we want to show them, what the exterior color looks like, interior colors, options, and make sure that we kind of cater any of those accessories to the markets that they’re in. And then, fortunately, we have our great field offices that help support us with all those cars. So, they order them for us for every single show. Every show has brand new cars out there.

Kelsey Soule: Oh, really?

Tyler Litchenberger: Are you kidding me?

Jackie Henry: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, my goodness.

Jackie Henry: So, we would love to have a certain fleet of cars and travel those throughout the country, but with all of the heavy overlap, and as [00:14:00] many people that come in and out of these cars, they would be completely destroyed. So-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, I was wondering because I mean, moving, you know, signage, like monitors, and, you know, technology like that, that seems a little bit more feasible. But the cars themselves, and the cars are really what you're showcasing. So, if some sort of logistic emergency happened, and you didn't have the car, it's kind of like, well, what's the point? So, how do you guys pick or how is it? Is it based on consumer preference? I think you said in the region, on what trim levels, what cars you put. Like obviously, this year at the New York Auto Show, we had the Supra out front. That was cool. But how do they-

Tyler Litchenberger: Supra goes everywhere now.

Kelsey Soule: How do they pick which cars go and which cars go where?

Tyler McBride: So, there is a mix involved. There is a collaboration of sorts, right? So, in terms of the production model vehicles that you see on the floor at shows, that is working with the respective regions, saying, you know, where's the demand in that region, what type of cars should we have, how should we accessorize [00:15:00] them, et cetera. And then, there are cars from a national level that we need to focus on, right?

The Supra., which is now on dealer lots, right?

Tyler Litchenberger: Everyone wants a Supra.

Tyler McBride: That's right. And we'll make sure that it's there. It's one of our priority vehicles. You know, we know that we're launching Highlander. Highlander was revealed at New York Auto Show. So, those prototypes will be utilized at strategic shows leading up to when that goes on sale and shows up on dealer lots, which is January. And after January, you're going to see Highlander, usually, on a turntable at most shows that you go to for the following months after it launches.

Kelsey Soule: Another question I had is when you walk into any given space, whether it's Detroit, Chicago, et cetera, I think, obviously, they have luxury in its own section, but do you guys have to bid on who gets the spot as soon as you walk through the door? I'm talking numbers here but like yes or no.

Tyler McBride: We're both laughing about that because each of these shows has a different process. [00:16:00] Some is pretty straightforward, right? Market share.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. Some is market share.

Tyler McBride: Others, there's a couple that are like, "Well, how does your kit look?" And as a result, you get some of our competitors, both on general market and luxury, that maybe have a really small market share in that market, but are going to be front and center at that show.

Kelsey Soule: Interesting.

Tyler McBride: And it's just something we deal with. It's again ... well, I don't know. It's frustrating sometimes.

Jackie Henry: Some shows, you just get grandfathered in. Some shows, this literally just happened this week, we did a space draw. So, you've got OEMs there, and they're drawing for spaces.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Jackie Henry: So, it's very different.

Tyler Litchenberger: It's like a TV show.

Jackie Henry: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: And so, then, based on like the space that you're assigned or that you get, then you create your kit, right? Because how do you create a kit for a space if you don't know what it looks like?

Tyler McBride: Well, so, part of that space selection, we have size parameters that we're working off of. But to Jackie's point, we have different sized kits that we utilize. And we try to bring an A kit to the major [00:17:00] of shows. Chigusa Mares, a member of our team, she's done this for eight seasons, going on nine. Fantastic member of our team. Can I just say ... give a huge shoutout since to Chigusa Mares?

Tyler Litchenberger: Chigusa is the best.

Tyler McBride: But she's in Washington DC right now to be in person, per requirements, to select our space at the Washington DC Auto Show. And we have a specific size parameter that we want to work with because that city and that market is strategic for us in many ways that we won't get into, but we need to be there [], because those are the requirements; but [], we want to ensure that it works with the size kit that we'll bring.

Kelsey Soule: Okay. So, one interesting thing. One of our producers said that when she was in high school, she knew boys that would go to auto shows and steal like, I think, your shift knob-

Tyler Litchenberger: I think that says more about her than-

Kelsey Soule: Stop that.

Tyler McBride: Yeah. Who's this producer you're speaking?

Kelsey Soule: So, is that a thing? And is that something you have to watch or do you have security onsite?

Tyler Litchenberger: With so many people coming through, yeah, how do you-

Kelsey Soule: Why?

Jackie Henry: It's definitely a thing. I think people take [00:18:00] it honestly. And so, we know that's going to happen everywhere, unfortunately. So, we definitely take preventative measures. We will ... we do what we call de-content cars. So, before we actually get them out on the show floor, we will take off all the gear shift knobs, radio knobs, SD cards

Tyler McBride: Fuses.

Jackie Henry: Fuses, we pull fuses. So, yeah, we basically de-content everything.

Tyler Litchenberger: Can I just say, what is wrong with you, people, if you're stealing at an auto show? Like the mom in me just-

Jackie Henry: So, if you come and sit in a car, and you see missing gear shift knob, that was very intentional.

Kelsey Soule: That's so weird.

Tyler McBride: It's disappointing, but it's something we have to deal with.

Jackie Henry: It's the reality that we have to deal with, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: But what's the flip side of that? Do you see families who are walking away and they're like, "Man, I'm going to get this 4Runner or GX because I sat in it and I love it"?

Jackie Henry: We definitely hear those comments all the time. And we hear our product specialists, and they've made such great connections with so many consumers on a personalized level, especially when there's that non-sales component of it-

Tyler McBride: Absolutely.

Jackie Henry: ...people walk away and be like, "You have just changed my entire perception of the brand," just because of that one experience.

Kelsey Soule: That's awesome. [00:19:00] But people ... like, okay. So, say I walk in and I have a great experience, I can't like buy a car onsite, right?

Tyler McBride: That's correct.

Kelsey Soule: Okay. Just making sure. So, it is-

Jackie Henry: Although I will say the Reno Auto Show is a selling show.

Tyler McBride: Spokane as well.

Kelsey Soule: There are some that you can-

Tyler Litchenberger: You know, in Spokane-

Tyler McBride: There are a few auto shows out there where you could actually purchase a car. However, that's through a dealer or a group of dealers that are there onsite to sell it, yeah.

Kelsey Soule: That are there, okay.

I mean, I think that it's important to know. That's an aspect that I didn't really consider that it is like no pressure. And you really ... I mean, it is one of the only opportunities where you can directly compare models across brands in one space. So, I think that it makes ... I mean, I think it makes a ton of sense.

Tyler McBride: Yeah. Kelsey, if you look at the numbers, about 23% of new car buyers have attended an auto show within 12 months prior to that purchase.

Kelsey Soule: Wow. That's really cool. I get it. I feel like this environment can be really intimidating to people because buying a car is intimidating in and of [00:20:00] itself. And I know that people can go in there. You don't have to have intention to buy. You can really just want to look. But as auto show experts, you've been to many. What do you think are some good tips for listeners to ... who may be intimidated by auto shows, what are some tips to navigate an auto show? And like from the moment they step in, what are some dos, some don'ts, you know, because it can be intimidating?

Jackie Henry: I think, well, it depends kind of like who the buyer is. But because auto shows are so big, I've been in I don't even know how many convention centers at this point in my life.

Kelsey Soule: Right. Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: You're like, "Where am I?"

Jackie Henry: Yeah. Bring comfortable walking shoes, number one.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, it is a big space.

Tyler Litchenberger: And there is carpet there, but it's concrete. So, it's hard on the back, people. Bring the comfy shoes.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. It's almost like you need to have a plan, but sometimes, not having a plan is good too because you may stumble upon something that maybe wasn't on your consideration list. And honestly, that's why we're in these auto shows, is [], we want to sell cars; but [], we want to create brand awareness and build that consideration. So, [00:21:00] you can go in with a plan but, usually, that's going to fall apart. I think every show, they have a map, you can go in, kind of see what you want to check out, and then almost wander from there.

Tyler McBride: Yeah. We have countless stories of people that went to an auto show, one, maybe not even considering Toyota or considering Toyota, and they came to look at the Camry, right? And they left going to their dealer to purchase an Avalon, or a Corolla, or a Highlander.

Jackie Henry: Yes. In terms of any other tips, maybe don't go on a weekend. If you want to avoid those crazy crowds, go on an evening.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Kelsey Soule: And so, once people get to the booth, you know, they find something that they want to look at, it's encouraged to like get in the driver's seat, you know, act like you're-

Tyler Litchenberger: Don't steal anything.

Kelsey Soule: Obviously. Get in the driver's seat, see how it feels, like adjust the seat, right? Like that's what they're there for, right?

Jackie Henry: Absolutely.

Tyler McBride: Yeah. If you're intimidated to go to one of our dealers, I understand. I mean, there really isn't—as the days of that old-school car [00:22:00] dealers-are over, right? And we really pride ourselves at Toyota of creating an excellent dealer experience that we're always looking to improve with our different franchises.

But one of the great things about an auto show is it really truly is low pressure. There's no one there to lay down the hard sale of why you should buy a car. They're there to support you with any questions that you may have. So, go there, wear the comfortable shoes, feel free to walk around and sit in the car, adjust the seat-

Kelsey Soule: Get some swag.

Tyler McBride: Ask as many questions as you want without feeling like you have to leave signing on the dotted line with a new Camry or Corolla.

Tyler Litchenberger: Get your weather video in your Prius all-wheel drive.

Tyler McBride: That's right. Yeah. I bring my kids to auto shows. I have three little ones. And they love just walking around and experiencing the cars.

Jackie Henry: They're fun.

Tyler McBride: I used to take them, and my son only wanted to look at vans and trucks. So, we would spend the whole time looking at vans and trucks, you know. And that's-

Tyler Litchenberger: Minivans.

Tyler McBride: It was a fun experience. Yeah. Well, he liked the large work vans, you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: The, like, sprinter vans like-

Tyler McBride: So, I can't ... I know all the large work vans.

Jackie Henry: It's like-

Tyler McBride: And Toyota doesn't even make a large van, [00:23:00] you know. But I know all about them because my son wants to look at every one of them.

Jackie Henry: I can relate. As a kid, I went to the San Diego Auto Show every single year, and I absolutely loved it. And for some reason, I gravitated towards vans too. There's just something about them.

Kelsey Soule: When I was a kid in Indiana, I went to the tractor shows, and sat on all the tractors. It's close. But I really did want a tractor for a long time.

Tyler Litchenberger: Of course, you do. They're amazing.

Kelsey Soule: I will say, so at the New York Auto Show, I actually ran into somebody who brought their service dog to test out different SUVs to see like, I mean, what was a good fit for the dog.

Tyler Litchenberger: That's so awesome.

Jackie Henry: And I thought that was really cool.

Tyler Litchenberger: Like the dog gets to pick.

Jackie Henry: Well, I mean, kind of, yeah. But like I mean, I think you should obviously bring ... if you're interested in buying a car, bring your kids, you know, bring-

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah, the people that are going to be in it with you.

Jackie Henry: I don't know if everybody can bring their dog, but I thought that was really cool.

Tyler McBride: No. On the note of bringing a service dog, the Toyota space that we ... the Toyota booth or auto show space and Lexus space, we try to make it accessible to all that all can test out the cars and experience them.

Tyler Litchenberger: [00:24:00] Enough space to get through.

Tyler McBride: And we do. We work really hard to make it accessible for all shapes and sizes, situations. We do work along those lines. I mean, there are some limitations that, of course, we run into, but, you know, the Toyota brand is for everyone, and we try to make ... we try to bring that experience to life when you're at the auto show.

Tyler Litchenberger: As a mobility company, it's the only right thing to do. What would you say is your favorite auto show memory either as a kid or now working to produce an auto show?

Jackie Henry: It's so hard to choose because there's been so many different events that I've been to and just stuff that we've seen. I mean, we see crazy stuff all the time. I mean-

Tyler Litchenberger: What's the craziest?

Jackie Henry: Oh, man. I mean, there's stuff that's actually almost normal, like people changing their babies in the back of cars. That's normal.

Tyler McBride: We had two proposals just this last season.

Jackie Henry: Oh, yeah. Proposals happen.

Kelsey Soule: Wait, what?

Jackie Henry: In the Toyota space, you guys had two of them, right?

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Kelsey Soule: Did they work? Did they work there or were they just-

Jackie Henry: She said yes.

Tyler McBride: They did not work. They just felt like the [00:25:00] Toyota space was the right space to ask-

Tyler Litchenberger: Can you paint a picture?

Tyler McBride: ... one of the biggest questions you could ask, if not biggest question.

Jackie Henry: Recreate that romantic moment-

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, my God.

Jackie Henry: ... in the Toyota live space, please.

Tyler Litchenberger: What part of this? I need to know more about this, Tyler.

Jackie Henry: It's the truck space.

Tyler McBride: So, I'm trying to remember the exact. I know we-

Tyler Litchenberger: Next to the-

Tyler McBride: I know we had it in Chicago. So, we did have one proposal in Chicago. And I can't remember if it was in front of the wrapped Chicago Cubs RAV4 or the wrapped Chicago White Sox RAV4.

Tyler Litchenberger: I'm going to go with Cubs.

Tyler McBride: So, you, Chicago listeners, whatever team you like, it's going to be that team that they proposed in. In Jackie's point, she did say yes.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right.

Tyler McBride: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Well, I'm just curious just like to know, you know, did they have a really big tie to the vehicle they were next to or like if they asked in advance or told us in advance like they're like ... Why?

Tyler McBride: Yes. A part of it seems surprising but you know, Jackie mentioned that she went to the San Diego Auto Show every year. For some people going to the auto show as an experience, there are quite a few people that are not in market, [00:26:00] but are still there to see what's out there, right? And we have quite a few Toyota fans that come by. So, on that side, I guess it's not that surprising because we know we have Toyota loyalists that stopped through the space. And if they've gone to that auto show as a couple for the last five years, then it seems like a good spot to pop the big question.

Kelsey Soule: There you go, find love at an auto show.

Jackie Henry: We've heard that there were some proposals at Lexus too.

Tyler Litchenberger: Of course, there were.

Jackie Henry: And people come back.

Kelsey Soule: I'm going to start going to auto shows differently.

Jackie Henry: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: You can get proposed to, and maybe you can find love too.

Jackie Henry: There you go.

Tyler McBride: Sometimes, some of our product specialists, these shows are long, they have to get to know each other-

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah. Uh-oh.

Tyler McBride: And at season's end-

Tyler Litchenberger: Wait, this is a reality show idea.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Jackie Henry: No.

Tyler McBride: ... the question has been popped within our own team.

Jackie Henry: Oh, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Really?

Tyler McBride: Yeah.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. They find love.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, love is on horizon.

Kelsey Soule: So, okay. So, when it comes to ... obviously, the immense amount of work that you guys do to make these auto shows happen, I think I said [00:27:00] earlier, like I'm really wondering how all of this gets into one space in and out and so quickly, right? So, what is it like to bring 15-20 cars into a convention center? Like how does that work?

Jackie Henry: Yeah. So, before we get to the car part, the first thing we have to do is move in all of the big displays into the space. And so, we literally have semi-trucks packed full of these large wooden crates that store all of our display properties. So, those come in first. All those crates get unloaded, display properties go up, then all those crates get moved out.

Kelsey Soule: So, sorry. Literally, semi-trucks drive into the convention center?

Jackie Henry: There's usually loading docks. And then, we've got forklifts. Forklifts will come and grab the crates out.

Kelsey Soule: Wait. I think it's important to say that because it's the immensity. I mean, when I walked into one of the shows, there was this giant Toyota logo hanging from the ceiling that had to be like 12 feet long.

Jackie Henry: Oh, yeah. We've-

Kelsey Soule: So, forklifts, cranes, et cetera?

Jackie Henry: We use forklifts, scissor lifts.

Tyler Litchenberger: Scissor lifts.

Jackie Henry: I mean, you name it. Like we [00:28:00] basically build many little houses inside of a convention center.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, that's insane.

Tyler McBride: We also need to be strategic on how many properties we're using that are requiring scissor lifts or forklifts because there are labor costs associated with each of those. Right? So, that takes some strategic management on the end of cost and labor and size of different things that go into that.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. And so, strategically, when we're building out these big kits, that's something that we are mindful of. So, we like to build things that are lightweight, easy-to-move because that usually equates to less labor hours, less fork time for some of the heavy machinery. So, that's all stuff that we think about when we're doing our planning all months or even years in advance, yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Right, yeah. Okay. So then, when it comes to bringing in the cars, what's that like?

Tyler Litchenberger: Because some of the shows are on like the second floor, right? So, they have to get up-

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: ... or down a couple of floors.

Tyler McBride: And some of these shows have marshaling yards, right? So, where we first part-

Tyler Litchenberger: What's that?

Tyler McBride: That's where we first unload and park the cars. And then, there's a [00:29:00] schedule of when we actually load in the vehicles, and it's ... it depends on where someone is located or how well of a relationship that brand has with the convention center and show.

Tyler Litchenberger: And who gets to load them? Like who drives them in?

Jackie Henry: We have an exhibit company that drives them in, or sometimes, it's the union labor that will drive the cars in.

Tyler Litchenberger: Okay.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Kelsey Soule: And so, then, obviously, they have to look their best when we'd get them in the space. So, do you have like a full detail company that comes in every single night? Are they like waxing it on the hour?

Tyler McBride: We do. We do have a detail company that comes in every night, but they also are on the shift floor, and they're detailing the car throughout the day.

Jackie Henry: We do it on the hour every hour. And you'll usually see someone going around with like a feather duster just all the time.

Tyler Litchenberger: Too many sticky fingers happen.

Jackie Henry: Oh, yeah, fingerprints everywhere.

Tyler McBride: Now, I know you said you've been to press days.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler McBride: Next time, come a day early, and we'll show you what the convention center looks like the night before.

Jackie Henry: During setup, yes.

Tyler McBride: Yeah, during setup.

Tyler Litchenberger: I've been. And it's like you go and you're like, "I don't [00:30:00] think we're going to make it guys, but I know Tyler's got this, so I'm just going to..." And then, you come back the next day and you're like, "This is a completely different space," when you're there for like-

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: ... executive rehearsals or whatever it is. It's crazy.

Tyler McBride: And that's part of our job as-

Tyler Litchenberger: Do you stay there the whole time for load-in, for all this stuff that's happening?

Tyler McBride: We stay there for a considerable amount of time during setup. We make sure that our team are hitting certain deadlines, and there's reasons for each of those deadlines, whether it's rehearsals, whether it's a certain press event that's coming up. And then, we're usually there through press. And then, maybe a public day. But we really rely on our business partners to execute and run a show.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah, yeah. You can't live your life in an auto show.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Jackie Henry: And then, we just have to go to the next one.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: Because, then your son will be like, "My dad lives in a van down by the river."

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Kelsey Soule: So, do you guys go check out other competitor's exhibits?

Tyler McBride: Absolutely.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. We walk the entire show floor.

Tyler Litchenberger: Get the champagne and walk?

Jackie Henry: Yeah. It's interesting because you will walk through, and then you start [00:31:00] picking up on things. You start recognizing the other kits that the other OEMs bring. So, you'll always know, it's like, "Oh, so and so has a new kit," or "They added this." So, yeah, we do.

Tyler McBride: And we have friends at the other brands as well that it's fun to say hi to and catch up with.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, yeah?

Tyler McBride: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Jackie Henry: It's our own little world in the auto show industry.

Tyler Litchenberger: I'm sure it is. You see the same people essentially when you go-

Jackie Henry: We do. We joke. We're like traveling carnies. We're our own little circus. We go to each city and we see the same people. We're like, "Oh, hey. Hi. It's you again."

Kelsey Soule: So, when it comes to ... obviously, like our industry is changing. And whether it's true or not, there are things set out there that people may not want to own cars as much. People take Ubers. People take different ride sharing. Will auto shows in the future have to change because of that?

Tyler McBride: Auto shows are always evolving. And I think, one of the ... well, one of the great things about an auto show is you can showcase future innovations. And not just showcase them by saying, "Here's what it is," but also show how it will affect someone's life, right?

Jackie Henry: [00:32:00] Yeah.

Tyler McBride: And one of the great things about auto shows at Toyota and Lexus is we're able to build an experience that not only talks about current models that you can purchase, but also what the future looks like, and how Toyota or Lexus will be part of that future.

Jackie Henry: And I think it's also a great opportunity, too, just for us to speak more about the brand because people know us as a car company but we're so much more than that. So, it really gives us a platform to do both.

Tyler McBride: The future of mobility will have lots of modes of transportation and lots of different ways to get around. And I think ... well, I know Toyota is at the forefront of a lot of those different methods.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, you're being asked to start incorporating a lot of those methods into auto shows to show people like iRoad and things like that?

Tyler McBride: Yeah, absolutely. Especially at the major auto shows. If you were to have gone to Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, New York this year, you would have seen a lot of those mobility solutions that Toyota is rolling out here in the future.

Tyler Litchenberger: And then, CES is now [00:33:00] an auto show in and of itself, right?

Tyler McBride: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right? Did that like get thrown in there at some point because, now, we go to CES as kind of an auto show?

Kelsey Soule: That's the Consumer Electric Show.

Tyler McBride: That's right. So, both Jackie and I, our teams manage our interaction or integration with the Consumer Electronics Show, CES. And it really has become an auto show, and additional major auto show, right? It's still, first and foremost, electronics show but it's a chance for automakers to showcase their innovations and how they're making people's lives easier, and where their ... their brands are going respectively.

Tyler Litchenberger: I think it's interesting because for people who don't know, in 2019, in January 2019, at CES, we showed a new autonomous platform on a LS 500, which is great, but the technology is Toyota Research Institute, right? So, you have both Toyota and Lexus brands kind of working together for CES. I thought that was interesting.

Tyler McBride: Yeah. You don't see that ... we don't really combine the brands very often. We try very hard to keep [00:34:00] them separate. There are moments though where it's very appropriate to show. For example, in this case, Toyota technology influencing a Lexus vehicle, which is the case all the time, but in the case of the Autonomous LS, it made a lot of sense to talk about, "Here's a Lexus car that is being fed by tons of research that's taking place at TRI."

Jackie Henry: Absolutely.

Kelsey Soule: Anything else that you feel like customers need to know before you go to an auto show or something that happens in the background that they may not know but can appreciate when they're there, besides everything? Yeah.

Tyler McBride: Just we are happy that people are there. We put a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into it.

Kelsey Soule: And there's truly nothing like it. Like I mean, I think if you haven't been, just go to one.

Jackie Henry: And I think that's a differentiator for people versus just going to a dealership. When you come to an auto show, it's honestly an experience. There's so much happening at every single booth that you get [00:35:00] to experience. Not just the vehicles, but everything that goes along with it. There are game shows. I mean, you name it. There's so much to do. And it's just a great opportunity to really just get in front of our target audiences in a non-pressure environment.

Kelsey Soule: And some small perks. I know that a lot of them have like coffee, snacks, like, you know, while you're looking around, like get something for free, right?

Tyler McBride: Oh, one of the staples of our-

Tyler Litchenberger: People love free stuff.

Tyler McBride: ... premiums that we give out is the Toyota Auto Show red bag, which you probably see around your respective towns everywhere.

Tyler Litchenberger: There's like 10 in my car.

Tyler McBride: But we-

Kelsey Soule: I don't even have one.

Tyler McBride: We produced those because of all the little giveaways that people get there.

Jackie Henry: I can tell you, the two top questions we get in the Lexus space is [], where's the bathroom? [], do you have a Toyota bag? Do you have a bag? No.

Kelsey Soule: I don't have a Toyota bag. Is it like reusable?

Jackie Henry: Yeah.

Tyler McBride: It is.

Jackie Henry: Like recyclable grocery bag. Yeah. And our philosophy at Lexus is we believe in Omotenashi, which is anticipating your guest's needs. So, we always keep a [00:36:00] show map at our info counter. So, when someone comes up to our product specialist and ask, "Where's this, you know, OEM?" We'll get out the map, like, "It's actually right here." So, we want to provide that guest experience. We're not just trying to be self-centered and only focused on ourselves.

Tyler Litchenberger: You're so nice. Lexus is so nice.

Jackie Henry: Yeah. But we encourage them to stay with us.

Tyler McBride: Our staff within the auto show space, their goal is to make the guest experience great. And there's nothing that ever says, "Make sure the Toyota guests experience is great, and make sure to bash everyone else that's in there." Right? They're told to make the guest experience great. And there are so many different ways we could do that, even if it means guiding them to the Porsche space, right?

Jackie Henry: Yeah. And the number one thing that we always want to make sure that they know is we will never talk badly about any of our other competitors ever. That's just not part of our philosophy.

Tyler Litchenberger: Can I add? So, a lot of the brand ambassadors or, you know, people that we have there helping, majority are female, and I feel like it used to be, back in the day, you know, you'd see the ladies teetering on their heels and the [00:37:00] short, tight dresses. And I feel like we're getting away from that as a country and society.

Jackie Henry: The spin and grin days are over.

Tyler Litchenberger: The spin and grin, amazing. Good. So, what is the approach there, like the thinking? How has that evolved for you guys like as you're planning?

Jackie Henry: Yeah. So, I think we really want to be mindful of our overall team demographic. I will say

actually our team is probably 60/40 split men and female, you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: Okay, great.

Jackie Henry: So, we want to make sure that we respect them and that they're in a comfortable environment. We don't want to put them in a position where they never feel comfortable on a show floor. So, I will say on the Lexus team, we have 42 wonderful Lexus product specialists. So, shoutout if you guys are listening. Love you, guys. You do a great job.

Tyler Litchenberger: They do. They do a fantastic job.

Jackie Henry: Tyler, what about you?

Tyler McBride: Well, I completely agree. We have a great mix of product specialists on our team, about 125. Good mix between men and women, diversity of thought backgrounds. It really is a great representation of our brand, and we're grateful for them for all the hard work that they put in to [00:38:00] learning our models and the value that they bring to each person and able to speak to each of those different selling points or advantages to each of the cars that we sell.

Kelsey Soule: So, I think a good way to wrap this up, it would be a question for both of you but there's two parts. So, what do you like most about this job? And what is the most difficult part of your job?

Tyler McBride: What I like most about this job is creating something for our guests. At Toyota Motor North America, a lot of the things that we do are in the hands of our dealers in terms of creating a guest experience. And with the auto shows, we have the opportunity to further that guest experience. And it's quite the honor. It's a privilege. And then, you get to make adjustments as you go along, right? This worked well last show. Let's change it and let's make a better experience.

I think the toughest thing is just the schedule, right? It is a tough job. And I know some people that have been in auto shows for decades, and I applaud them. It would be a tough thing to do this your whole life without some sort of, you know, [00:39:00] awesome vacation plan that they have every year where they go away for like a month or so.

Kelsey Soule: Got you. Awesome.

Jackie Henry: And that's kind of my mind. It's almost like the thing I love and dislike is probably the same thing. I love the travel. I'm going around to all these different cities throughout the country, it's fantastic, and just creating that direct consumer impact and being on the front lines in our own way, that's awesome. But to Tyler's point, the travel, it's pretty extensive, right? So, there are times where I have city-hopped, and I've gone from Dallas to Houston, Cleveland, Philly, DC, St. Louis, and finally back home. So, living out of a suitcase can be tough, but at the end of the day, I mean, I love it. It's fun and couldn't be more thankful.

Tyler McBride: For the record, I don't travel like Jackie. So, she's quite the red warrior.

Jackie Henry: You got other people on your team.

Tyler Litchenberger: Kelsey, I think I'm convinced now that I probably should have gone to auto shows as a kid, and I should probably start taking my kids and my family too.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. No, I think that obviously, our conversation today is really eye-opening because I mean, I think a lot of people think of auto shows just for the media or for car enthusiasts. But if you [00:40:00] just want

a low-pressure environment to go shop around, quite literally, you can see every auto maker there, it seems like auto shows are the spot to do it.

Tyler Litchenberger: It is. All right, Jackie, Tyler, thank you so much for coming on Toyota Untold.

Kelsey Soule: Thank you.

Jackie Henry: Thanks guys.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Jackie Henry: Bye.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, there you have it. We hope you enjoyed that spirited discussion and gained some new insight into the thought, planning, and work that goes into these auto shows. As I said at the beginning of the episode, it's uncertain what auto shows will look like in the months ahead but know that the safety of our customers, team members, and business partners is always Toyota's top priority and is top of mind as we figure out how to move forward. It's my sincere hope that you'll be able to come visit us in an auto show some time in the near future.

This episode also marks the end of our second season of Toyota Untold. We've had a fantastic time bringing you a behind-the-scenes look at your favorite auto maker, and we're going to take a few months off to put together an amazing third season for you. Be on the lookout for brand-new [00:41:00] episodes starting this fall. In the meantime, please stay happy, healthy, and safe, and we'll see you soon.

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