

Imagination and Passion Intersect at SEMA

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It takes a bold imagination to pair the art of hand-lettered signs with a state-of-the-art sports car legend. But one look at the inventive orange-and-yellow lettering painted across a 2021 GR Supra and it's clear that something highly original is going on here. This pop culture powerhouse is just one of a clutch of custom builds Toyota

presented at the 2020 Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) Show. For safety reasons, the event's usual miles of aisles of innovative debuts were transformed into a virtual experience dubbed SEMA360. To get ready for the showcase, Toyota tapped into peak performance both on and off the pavement.

The online forum allowed more people to experience Toyota's creativity (almost) firsthand. The SEMA Show live event usually takes place in Las Vegas, connecting the automotive aftermarket industry with special programming.

"SEMA is always a chance to showcase our imagination and our passion for cars," said Ed Laukes, TMNA's general vice president of Toyota Division Marketing. "But virtual shows give us the opportunity to really showcase a lot of different technology and include a lot more people."

This year, Toyota unveiled vehicles in two waves, starting with four SEMA360 debuts during the Nov. 2-6 showcase, and rolling out additional concepts over several weeks. The first wave featured a handful of special builds, including an Overland-Ready Tacoma, an Ornamental Conifer GR Supra and two Formula GR Supra Drift builds.

Expanding on Our Heritage

Toyota's SEMA build unveilings are a special event for the public because they showcase creative, forward-thinking vehicles that maximize the delight that customers see in the automaker's current lineup. *4WD Toyota Owner Magazine* is just one example.

While Toyota's off-road roots run deep, overlanding may not be an everyday activity for the typical Toyota customer. But this year, overlanding has become increasingly popular as people get out and explore off the beaten path.

The ultimate off-pavement rig started as a Tacoma TRD Pro. It was converted into the outdoor machine by adding features like a Hi-Lift[®] jack and Yakima[®] SkyRise cargo bed tent, along with fuel and water storage — innovation that wouldn't be possible without Toyota's strong foundation in trucks.

"Being a truck brand is really difficult, just considering the amount of competition that's out there," Laukes said. "But Toyota has a long truck lineage, so when we get back to our off-road heritage, it's easy for us to expand, because we have that foundation."

Showcasing Our Technical Expertise

Racing took center stage at SEMA360, with two great additions to the Toyota Motor Sports Program. In the first wave, Toyota displayed the Ornamental Conifer GR Supra and two Supra drift racers. The two Formula Drift builds are the Papadakis Racing Rockstar Energy Drink Toyota GR Supra, driven by Fredric Aasbo, and the GReddy Performance Formula D GR Supra, driven by Ken Gushi.

"I think racing enhances the brand because it gives us the ability to showcase our technical expertise," Laukes said. "But it also shows our ability to work with different drivers in different series and showcase their expertise."

Since racing is such an expansive sport—from off-road trucking to NASCAR[®] — creating innovative designs in the sports car category can appeal to many different fan bases. When it comes to the SEMA360 releases, keep an eye out for both new Supras in the Formula Drift Pro Class (and the Winner's Circle).

What's Next?

While all of the SEMA360 builds are inspired by Toyota's regular lineup, the idea for the vehicles in the second wave started with a history lesson. And of course, the second round will include even more Supras—this time with a sport top.

“If you look at the history of the Supra, the one that had the sport top on it is the one that everybody likes to showcase,” he said. “So, when we built this one, I challenged the team back in the motorsports garage to see if they could figure out how to build a sports top for SEMA.”

SEMA360 releases pay homage to Toyota's past while utilizing the technology of the future. Attention-grabbing builds like the [Supra Sport Top](#) use Toyota's history to spark public interest and forecast the potential to move innovations into tomorrow's production class.

Despite the year's challenges, Team Toyota was able to pivot to the online format, and the virtual SEMA360 was a success. Laukes said that the team's willingness and ability to execute the special builds in an unusual year demonstrates their commitment to innovation and creativity.

“Toyota has always played a big part in SEMA,” he said. “So, for us to be able to still go all out this year from a showcase perspective, I think is a really great indicator of how well our team can pull through and work together, despite the pandemic. It shows how committed we are to these special builds and to continue doing things like this in the future.”

Disclaimer: Vehicles have been modified with non-Genuine Toyota parts and accessories; May not be drivable, under warranty, or street legal. Trademarks appearing on the vehicles are those of their respective owners.