

Dog Days and Horsepower: Toyota, Lexus Enthusiasts Converge on Motor City for Summer Car Show

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Across America, car shows are synonymous with the summer season. It's a partnership comprised of warm temperatures and hot vehicles. Toyota and Lexus owners share an appreciation for sweet summertime rides, as evidenced by an annual car show in the Midwest – in downtown Detroit, of all places.

Every July, the All Toyotas of the Midwest (ATOM) car club holds a one-day car show that celebrates Toyota, Lexus and Scion ownership. This enthusiast group exists online, via Facebook, and boasts about 2,000 members. Owners' vehicles range from marvelously-maintained classics to heavily-modified sports cars and trucks. It was ATOM's strong sense of community that spurred Michigan member Ray Chan, a Toyota Research & Development team member in Ann Arbor, to take their collective passion to the streets.

"There was a real interest by members to meet up and share their vehicles in person," Chan said. "The passion was genuine. They just needed a date and location."



Chan took on the challenge. With a little seed money from local sponsors, the first ATOM Car Show was held in 2016, on a playfield at Kensington Metropark in suburban Detroit. It attracted a modest 50-60 vehicles, with most of the owners from Michigan. The next year it grew by a few more cars in the parking lot of a shopping mall in Novi. The show blossomed to nearly 80 vehicles in 2018 when it was held at the Automotive Hall of Fame in Dearborn, drawing in several owners from surrounding states. That year, the event was dubbed the “Toyoda Car Show,” as it helped commemorate the recent induction of Toyota Motor Corporation founder Kiichiro Toyoda into the prestigious automotive museum.

In 2019, ATOM took its event to the new Lexus Velodrome in downtown Detroit. The Lexus-branded cycling facility, with expansive parking lot and internal display space, provided the perfect indoor/outdoor venue for owners and enthusiasts. One of the side attractions included miniature remote-controlled (RC) race cars, participating in drifting exhibitions for visitors. The event drew more than 125 vehicles and around 200 people.

In 2020, ATOM contemplated cancelling its event due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly every established car show in metro Detroit had already postponed their events, including the world-renowned Woodward Dream Cruise. Craving external interaction and an enduring love for cars, ATOM’s members and fans begged for a safe continuation of the show. By July, the State of Michigan’s crowd size and public distancing protocols allowed for an event of ATOM’s stature to commence, albeit with full-time facemasks, temperature scans and sanitization stations for visitors. Buoyed by the presence of several rare and historic vehicles, courtesy of the Toyota Museum (Experience Center) in Plano, the event attracted about 150 vehicles

and more than 250 people.



“The event exceeded everyone’s expectations,” Chan said. “For a day, our owners and fans enjoyed some form of normalcy, courtesy of our unique car culture. You could see the appreciation in their eyes, just above their masks.”

The recently-completed 2021 ATOM Car Show continued to set new standards, with more than 200 vehicles on display and 500+ people enjoying the festivities. The show had a motorsports theme, as Toyota Racing Development (TRD) delivered several retired racing properties, including a Kyle Busch stock car and an Ivan “Ironman” Stewart Baja truck. The grassroots racing team at Toyota Research & Development near Ann Arbor also displayed three rally cars, including a Prius, and team members from the Product Engineering department at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky (TMMK) brought two track-prepped vehicles – a Camry and GT86 – to the event. Show goers were also provided access to an array of TRD Pro vehicles, courtesy of local dealer Wolverine Toyota.

However, the true stars of the ATOM Car Show continue to be loyal customers who are proud of their vehicles. The show’s awards program is a highlight of the event, as pristine historic products are pitted against Fast & Furious-style performance cars, lifted trucks and rare Japanese Domestic Market (JDM) vehicles from overseas.

“This was my first ATOM event and I really enjoyed it because of all the like-minded people,” said Chicagoan

and rising star driver Jackie Ding, who captured 2021 Best Race Car Award honors for his “Time Attack” 2020 Supra, an incredibly-modified machine that has nearly two years of constant, competitive racing experience. “This is a special award because of the level of competition at this show.”



2021 Best of Show honors went to another first-time attendee, Amanda Latz of Chelsea, Mich. She displayed an accessories-laden 2011 4Runner Trail Edition with a lift kit and a fully-equipped travel trailer with an elevated tent. Latz is an avid outdoorsperson who loves overlanding, fishing and kayaking. She belongs to the Lady Owned Toyotas (LOTs) social club, which has thousands of members nationwide.

“I’m still a bit shocked by the award,” Latz admitted. “I’ve put a lot of time into my build and I spoke to a lot of passionate owners about my vehicle’s journey. You could definitely feel the love from the Toyota community.”

ATOM’s love is evident by its charitable efforts. Since its inception, the car show has raised nearly \$20,000 for a few local charities in metro Detroit, most notably the Detroit Fitness Foundation and 4 Paws For Ability, an organization that provides service dogs to disabled children and veterans who have lost use of their limbs or hearing.