

Toyota's T-TEN Program Continues to Evolve with the Shift to Alternative Powered Vehicles

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For more than 35 years, Toyota's Technician and Education Network (T-TEN) has developed and placed talented, factory-certified technicians in many automotive dealerships across the U.S., including both Toyota and Lexus' service centers.

Today, T-TEN students are gearing up for the future as the program launches alternative powered vehicle (APV) maintenance training in schools across the country. The program is yet another investment the automaker is making to create the infrastructure to support its shift toward hybrid and other electrified powertrains.

According to Mike Godson, T-TEN senior faculty at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, the addition of APV training is a transformative change that students have been hoping for.

"My students have been doing maintenance work on hybrids for a long time," Godson says. "They just haven't been doing anything when it comes to the high voltage system. Toyota training programs have always been on the cusp of the latest technology, and since alternate power is the direction the industry is going, it's a natural progression for the program."

Toyota and Lexus' T-TEN program partners with schools and organizations to offer students an opportunity to earn degrees and certificates that adhere to training standards in the automotive industry. Once they complete the program, graduates can apply for open service technician positions at Toyota and Lexus dealerships or any other automotive service operation, including independent service and repair shops. Of the 38 T-TEN schools, five have begun APV programs, with the rest scheduled to begin in 2022.

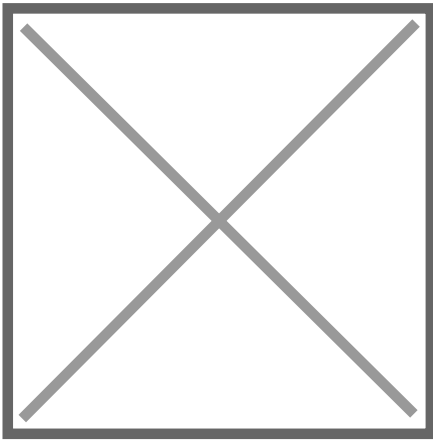
"Consumer demand has been shifting," Godson says. "Toyota has been shifting its production focus and putting out more hybrid and electric-based vehicles. When students come out of T-TEN with hybrid certifications, they'll be in a better position to service their customers. That's what we're working toward."

Bridging the Talent Gap

The Toyota and Lexus T-TEN program works to fill the pipeline for well-trained, certified technicians with hands-on automotive diagnosis and repair education.

According to Joseph Myers, technician development manager, there is a widespread talent gap, as many experienced automotive techs are reaching retirement age. A 2020 study by [TechForce](#), points out that the demand for vehicle technicians outpaces the supply by nearly three to one. Between 2020 and 2024, the industry will need approximately 642,000 new automotive, diesel and collision techs to address the shortage.

"Dealerships are always looking for technicians, especially now," Myers says. "Having highly trained technicians is critical to the success of the company because they are on the front line of our customers being satisfied with the product."



Joseph Myers, technician development manager

When a student initially expresses interest in the program, T-TEN locates open positions at dealerships. From there, students attend classes for three days a week, and work in the field for three days a week. This schedule allows students to get hands-on experience in tandem with classroom lessons, in addition to helping further refine the program based on what dealers need.

“It’s really about technician development,” Godson says. “It’s a partnership. We get cued by the dealer on what they need the student to be able to do. When we work together, the outcome is better. Every dealer I work with wants more T-TEN students.”

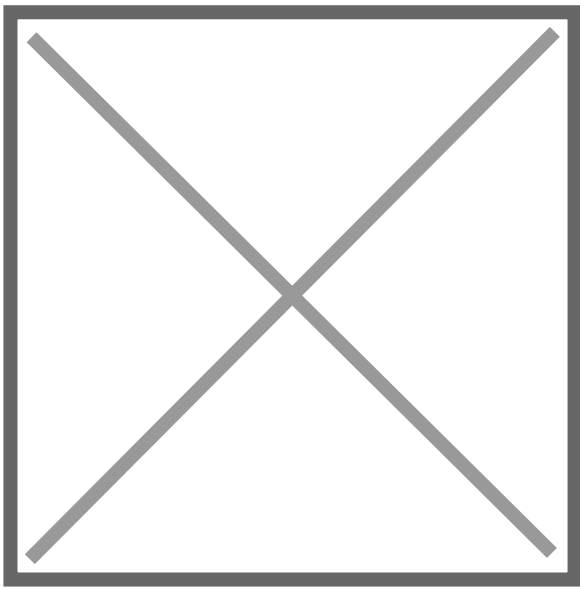
The T-TEN curriculum prepares students to take the Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) test, the benchmark for automotive technicians, which covers a total of eight areas. And with the new APV training, T-TEN graduates will also be positioned to take the L3 series, the Light Duty Hybrid/Electric Vehicle Specialist test.

Why Include APV Training?

In the past, the automotive training program standard required technicians to have about five years of experience and be at a master level before participating in hybrid training. After examining the direction of the industry, Toyota reconsidered this requirement and began developing hybrid training at the postsecondary level.

Working with electric vehicles requires different safety procedures because of high-voltage vehicle components. While developing the training, T-TEN program experts considered the safety procedures of other programs at vocational schools that handle high-voltage materials to ensure that the electrical safety courses are state-of-the-art.

According to Godson, the students always want to learn more about the latest technology, much of which involves electric systems. Even if the entire vehicle isn’t electric, training is important when it comes to advanced driver-assist systems and other computer-related maintenance and diagnostics.



Mike Godson, T-TEN senior faculty at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington

“Electricity has always been used in vehicles,” Godson says. “The big change that I got to experience over the years is the introduction of computer systems. The key now is not only understanding the basics of electricity but understanding how computer systems operate. That’s what’s going to take a technician to the next level.”

For example, Christian Dunn, a technician at Ron Tonkin Toyota in Portland, Oregon, participated in the pilot program of the hybrid training at Clark College. After taking the course on hybrid vehicle systems and advanced technologies, Dunn graduated from the T-TEN program and passed the ASE and L3 test.

“There’s sort of a fear about working on hybrids, just because of the unknown,” Dunn says. “But the class breaks it down and teaches you that it’s not some mysterious system that’s going to hurt you. It’s built with a lot of safety systems, and it’s all the same concepts. You just need to know how it all works.”

Continuously Improving the Program

T-TEN encourages each school to hire Toyota or Lexus master technicians. Myers, who was an educational consultant before becoming a manager, says all the instructors have been in the industry for at least five years or have been technicians for 10 to 20 years. To help transition technicians into the classroom, Toyota educational consultants develop a suite of instructional courses and trainings to ensure a high-quality education of each of the students.

T-TEN program experts like Myers are constantly reviewing the curriculum to ensure it includes the most recent vehicle lineup and technologies. Toyota’s commitment to continuous improvement means the program is always growing and adapting to the current landscape of the industry, both in cases like implementing a semi-virtual environment during COVID-19, and the addition of APV training.

“There was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm from the students and potential students when T-TEN began testing and incorporating hybrid and electric technology in T-TEN,” Myers says. “They’re eager for this and it makes them feel like they’re doing something to make a difference in the world.”