

# Toyota Steps Up After Hurricane Destroys Million-Mile Highlander

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To say Mark Miller was attached to his 2006 Toyota Highlander Hybrid would be an understatement.

During its over 1 million miles on the road, it was Miller's "workhorse," often towing trailers for his asphalt paving business and even serving as an office during his almost daily work trips.

"I've probably done about 8,000 trips across Alligator Alley in that Highlander," said Miller, referring to an 80-mile stretch of Interstate 75 that cuts through the Florida Everglades.



Since it was his first-ever Toyota and first vehicle to own brand new, Miller said taking care of it was a priority, which is why he had a go-to mechanic in Frank Brice of Germain Toyota of Naples. Not that he needed to rely on him too much.

“That vehicle was so dependable,” he said. “I think I took it for granted at times. After 17 years, only a catastrophic flood could kill it.”

Unfortunately, that’s precisely what happened in September 2022 when Hurricane Ian hit Florida.



## **A Catastrophic Surge**

“Our house is fairly new, with good windows and an elevated driveway, so we thought we could ride it out at the house,” Miller said of the hurricane. “Well, the storm surge was bigger than anything I’d ever seen or heard of. By the time the water receded, we had someone’s floating dock in our backyard.”

Miller’s home in Bonita Springs, Florida, was flooded, and his faithful Highlander destroyed. While Miller was crushed, he knew others had it worse.

“There are still boats in trees down there in Fort Meyers Beach,” he said of those closer to the coast.

In the aftermath, he focused on rebuilding, along with the rest of the community. But Miller said he couldn’t help but reminisce about his Highlander Hybrid, especially while on his work road trips after its demise.

“I didn’t realize until I was driving another vehicle just how comfortable and what an easy ride my Highlander was,” he said. “It never let me down.”

Little did Miller know at the time, he would be getting another Highlander Hybrid, and sooner than he could imagine.

### **The Journey to a Happy Ending**

On Jan. 21, Miller walked into the same dealership he long trusted to care for his 2006 Highlander Hybrid — Germain Toyota of Naples. He had been asked to visit the dealership to share his story but had an idea a surprise might be in store for him.

“My wife and I were talking, and she said, ‘Oh, you’re going to get another cooler,’” he said, referring to when Germain Toyota of Naples gave him a cooler when his Highlander Hybrid hit 500,000 miles.

The surprise was a lot bigger than that.

### **The Happy Ending**

Enter Richard Germain, the owner of Germain Toyota of Naples, and Wendell Hardy, the general manager. After Miller shared his story with everyone at the dealership, Germain and Hardy approached him to thank him for his loyalty.

“The fact that you rode your Toyota for over 16 years, put over 1 million miles on it and allowed us to be a part of keeping that vehicle going for you, in my mind, probably makes you the most loyal customer that we’ve ever had,” Germain said to Miller. “We wanted to thank you for that loyalty. So, on behalf of Toyota and the Toyota family, we would like to reward you for your loyalty by replacing that 2006...”

Enough said because parked behind Miller was a new 2023 Highlander Hybrid Bronze Edition with a giant red bow on it. And in the perfect color for someone who owns an asphalt paving business – cement grey.



“Oh, you’re kidding me,” Miller said as a giant smile overtook his face and Germain handed him the keys. “Oh, my God.”

“This is tremendous,” he gushed. “My heart is just all over the place. I’m overwhelmed. This is just an incredible thing.”

And while Miller plans to retire soon, making it unlikely he’ll hit another million miles in his new Highlander Hybrid, he did have some immediate plans for the SUV.

“I’m going home to load up my tools,” he said. “But first, I need to protect this. I’m going to get some seat covers. This is a magical moment. Picking up my 2006 Highlander Hybrid was magic, but this is super magic.”

Before he drove off into the sunset with his new vehicle, Miller gave some parting advice to those hoping to hit a million miles in their Toyotas.

“NEVER forget to change your oil!”