



KENTUCKY'S OTHER HORSEPOWER

Toyota Builds a Strong Presence in the Bluegrass

By Vickie Mitchell | Photos by Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky

In January 1986, 100 people were on the waiting list for a new course at Transylvania University: “Japanese: Basic Conversation and Business Customs.” It was one sign that the Bluegrass was about to change in a big way. Those hopeful students were among hundreds of citizens preparing for the arrival of Toyota Motor Manufacturing USA, now Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky (TMMK).

Toyota was coming to Kentucky, and the company was breaking new ground literally and figuratively in Georgetown, Ky., a small town north of Lexington with good access to Interstate 75 and plenty of land on which to build.

There, on 1,300 acres of former farmland, Toyota would build its first wholly owned North American auto assembly plant and produce the Toyota Camry.

Foreign manufacturing plants have since become commonplace, but two decades ago, both sides regarded such an experiment with trepidation.

Kentuckians were excited at the prospect of new jobs and opportunities the plant would bring but concerned too about problems that might accompany the foreign-owned entity.

Some derided Gov. Martha Layne Collins for the incentive package — \$305 million in all — that she convinced Kentucky’s General Assembly to approve to entice Toyota. Others worried about rapid growth, surging land prices, increased traffic, and water and air pollution.

Kentucky Gov. Martha Layne Collins shakes hands with Shoichiro Toyoda, president of Toyota Motor Corporation, at the 1985 announcement of the Georgetown plant.

TIMELINE

1985

January

Toyota Motor Manufacturing U.S.A is established, and the search begins to find a site for Toyota's first American auto assembly plant.

November 6

From the more than dozen states being considered by Toyota, the field narrows to five: Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

December 11

Months of speculation end as Gov. Martha Layne Collins and U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell announce that Scott County, Ky., will be the site of Toyota's first wholly owned North American manufacturing plant, an \$800 million facility that will employ 3,000. A few days later Collins receives six standing ovations from 1,100 students and 275 townspeople during a town meeting at Scott County High School.

1986

May 4

State officials say 15 auto parts suppliers, mostly Japanese, have expressed interest in locating in Kentucky.

May 5

Two days after Ferdinand wins the 112th Kentucky Derby with Bill Shoemaker aboard, ground is broken for Toyota Motor Manufacturing U.S.A. on a 1,300-acre site just off Interstate 75, four miles from downtown Georgetown. Collins' guests for Derby week include Shoichiro Toyoda, president of Toyota Motor Corporation, and his wife.



September 11

Trinity Industrial Corporation becomes one of the first Toyota suppliers to operate in Kentucky when it breaks ground for its first American plant in Scott County. It will supply painting systems for Toyota.

1988

March

In the year since the state began taking job applications for Toyota, more than 120,000 people have inquired about the 3,300 jobs to be filled there.

May 26

The first car built in Georgetown rolls off the assembly line to great fanfare. The white, second-generation 1989 Camry LE is driven through paper curtains on a stage by team leader John Wilson. The first Georgetown Camry is destined for a life of leisure; it now resides in the plant's visitors center. White is the second most popular color for the Camry; silver is the most popular color.



July 11

Commercial production of the Camry begins, and the first cars off the line are painted in the patriotic colors of red, white, and blue—a salute to Toyota's new American home.

August

Ground is broken for a power train plant, which will make four-cylinder engines. It is the first of several expansions at the Georgetown plant.

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Toyota was nervous as well.

"Twenty years ago Toyota took a giant step in North America," said Fujio Cho, who was president of TMMK during its first six years of production, as he addressed guests at TMMK's 20th anniversary celebration two years ago. "In the beginning we were anxious. We were not sure if we would be accepted in the U.S. and especially in Kentucky. But as it turned out, the people of the community and the state welcomed us wholeheartedly and with open arms."

Toyota's strong start in Kentucky gave the automaker the confidence to build more plants in the United States. Today there are seven auto assembly plants in North America; another will open in 2010 in Mississippi. The Kentucky plant remains the largest Toyota auto assembly plant outside of Japan.

During its two decades of operation, the Georgetown plant has doubled its size and number of employees. Much of its suc-

FAST FACTS

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky (TMMK)

7,000 employees (team members) live in 76 Kentucky counties, 2,000 of them in Scott County. More than 2,000 have worked at the plant 10 years or more. TMMK's annual payroll is \$516 million.

Doing the numbers:

55: seconds an assembly-line team member has to get parts on a car

2,000: parts on a Toyota Camry

350: TMMK suppliers

90: Kentucky suppliers

600: robots that perform 97 percent of welding

400 to 500: welds per car

9.5: hours in the paint shop per car

15 to 16: coats of paint per car

400 to 500: semi tractor-trailers that come and go at the plant each day

35,000 to 40,000: average number of visitors a year

514,000: vehicles built at Georgetown plant in 2007



October 6

The Lexington Philharmonic plays, and Shoichiro Toyoda, president of Toyota Motor Corporation, presides as Toyota's Georgetown plant celebrates its grand opening. Collins and Greg Newby, a Woodford County native and a team leader at Toyota, get a standing ovation from 1,600 Toyota employees.

1990

Tahara-cho, Japan, becomes Georgetown's Sister City. The Japanese city of 40,000, sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and Mikawa Bay, is home to a large Toyota assembly plant.

April

Visitors are handed clear safety glasses and loaded onto trams to see the sights as regular public tours of the plant begin. Since then, nearly half-a-million people have visited. Free tours are given Monday-Friday at 10 a.m., noon, and 2 p.m., with an additional evening tour at 6 on Thursdays. In 2003 the Toyota tour was named one of the 10 Best Places to Watch Stuff Being Made in a *USA Today* feature story.

October

The Georgetown plant earns the first of many J.D. Power plant quality awards.

November

Two years after it begins production, Toyota announces it will double the size and capacity of its vehicle plant. When the expansion is completed, the plant will be the size of 156 football fields under one roof, 7.5 million square feet in all.

1991

August

Over half-a-million Camrys have been made in Georgetown.

1992

Toyota announces it will expand its power train plant to produce V-6 engines. Two-and-a-half years later, production begins.

1993

February

The plant opens an on-site fitness and child care center for its employees.

October

TMMK produces its one-millionth Toyota.

1994

June

TMMK begins its Volunteers in Place program to recognize employees for their volunteer efforts and to give them the opportunity to volunteer as groups for volunteer projects sponsored by Toyota.

June

To enhance its tour program, the plant opens an 11,500-square-foot visitors center with interactive displays, cars, exhibits, and historic photos.

Plant expansion is completed and increased production begins. Employment expands as well. Toyota will eventually increase its workforce to 7,000, more than twice the employment originally announced.

September

TMM begins producing V-6 engines.

1999

The plant achieves Zero Hazardous Waste Landfill status. Throughout its history the plant has added programs aimed at reducing waste and environmental impact. It has recycled discarded steel since production began in 1988. In recent years it has begun a composting program, turn-

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POSITIVE PARTNERSHIP

It seems natural that two Bluegrass stalwarts whose business is horsepower — Toyota and Keeneland — would team up, and in 1996 they did in a big way when Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky, five area Toyota dealerships, and Toyota Motor Sales in Cincinnati began sponsoring the spring meet's Blue Grass Stakes. Although Toyota had sponsored other sporting events, it was the automaker's first foray into horse racing.

Corporate sponsorship for racing was not so common then as Toyota joined Ashland Inc., a longtime Kentucky-based corporation that has sponsored the Ashland Stakes since 1986.

As part of the sponsorship agreement, Keeneland agreed to begin replacing cars in its fleet with Toyotas and to have a Toyota Day at the track for the manufacturing plant's employees.

Toyota's sponsorship allowed the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes to become a \$700,000-guaranteed race, an increase of \$200,000. Since then it has become a grade I \$750,000 race and one of the most prestigious and most watched of the Kentucky Derby prep races.


It also has helped make Toyota Blue Grass Stakes Day a major calling card for the racetrack. Two of Keeneland's top four single-day attendance records were Toyota Blue Grass Stakes Days in 2005 (33,621) and 2006 (30,660). Toyota Blue Grass Stakes Day has also set records in terms of on-track wagering. Keeneland's all-time record single-day mutuel handle was set on Blue Grass day in 2007; eight of its top 10 records for on-track wagering were set on Blue Grass Stakes Days.

The race was first run at the old Kentucky Association track and Keeneland revived it in 1937. Since then, the Blue Grass Stakes has served as an important prep race for the Kentucky Derby. Last year Street Sense finished second by a nose in the 2007 Blue Grass, his last prep race before winning the Derby.

— Vickie Mitchell



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ing leftovers and other compostable trash from six on-site cafeterias into compost on its grounds. It also reuses groundwater and recycles plastics and cans. TMMK is the first assembly plant in North America to achieve zero landfill status. Its various recycling and reuse programs have kept 16,000 tons of waste from landfills each year.

2000

October

In addition to exchanges of business people and students, the Sister Cities' alliance with Tahara-cho inspires the creation of a Japanese garden. Groundbreaking for the six-acre Yuko-En on the Elkhorn on Scott County's Elkhorn Creek marks the 10th anniversary of the Sister Cities. Yuko-En is proclaimed the Kentucky-Japan Friendship Garden.

2001

The plant receives a J.D. Power silver plant quality award, its eighth J.D. Power award in 12 years. Four of them are gold awards. It will receive another silver award in 2006.

April

Gary Convis becomes the Georgetown plant's fifth president and the first American president of a Toyota manufacturing plant.

2002

July

A Camry produced in Georgetown becomes the 10-millionth Toyota produced in North America.

2003

Use of more-efficient robots begins in paint shop to reduce paint usage.

2006

May 20

More than 9,000 team members and others gather at Rupp Arena for a dinner to celebrate Toyota's 20th anniversary in Kentucky. Among the speakers is Fujio Cho, president of TMMK from 1988 to 1994. Former Gov. Martha Layne Collins, Japan's U.S. ambassador Ryozi Kato, and Gov. Ernie Fletcher are on hand to hear a performance by country singer Keith Urban.

July

Steve St. Angelo becomes the sixth president of Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky.



October 12

TMMK goes green in a big way when it becomes the first Toyota plant in North America to produce a hybrid vehicle. The Georgetown plant is expected to build about 48,000 Camry hybrids a year. Among the seven colors available is Jasper Pearl, a mellow green that best reflects the car's environmental advantage.

2008

January

Toyota unveils its newest vehicle, the Venza, which was developed with the input and involvement of team leaders at the Georgetown plant and which will be made there. The plant plans to produce about 75,000 Venzas a year.

In 2008 the 20-millionth Toyota made in the U.S. will roll off the line at one of seven auto assembly plants. It could very well be at TMMK, the largest of Toyota's seven North American auto assembly plants.



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cess has been fueled by the popularity of the Camry, the top-selling sedan in the United States for most of the past decade. That demand, coupled with the plant's ability to adapt easily its assembly line to make other cars including the Avalon, Solara, and, soon, the new Venza, and its commitment to retraining employees whose jobs might be lost to advances in technology or changes in production has allowed the plant to avoid the layoffs so common in modern manufacturing.

It also won over the region by supporting local projects and charities, giving millions through the years to organizations ranging from the University of Kentucky library and Thoroughbred Park to the Kentucky History Center and the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Department.

Exempted from property taxes for the first 20 years as part of its incentive package, the plant opted to make annual in-lieu-of-tax payments, which allowed Scott County to improve its schools.

In late 1985, when Toyota president Shoichiro Toyoda announced his company's decision to locate in the state, he called the state "our new 'old Kentucky home.' "

More than 20 years later, those sentiments have been rein-



forced by Toyota's relationship with the state and its people. As Cho told the crowd at Toyota's anniversary celebration, "Now, every time I return to Kentucky, I am back in 'my old Kentucky home.' " 🐎

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