

The History of Toyota in NASCAR by Betsy Bearden

Whether it was on foot, horseback, two wheels, or four wheels—racing has been a competitive sport since the beginning of time. And when it comes to racing, there is nothing more American than stock car racing. Its roots are steeped in moonshine, revenuers, souped up cars, and men who knew how to drive them like their lives depended on it. From outrunning *The Law*, to seeing who had the fastest car in town by lining up and racing each other in makeshift competitions, the growing popularity of stock car racing and the need for speed was recognized by NASCAR founder, Bill France Sr. in 1947-1948.

NASCAR is an all-American favorite pastime, and more people tune in to watch it over all other sporting events in America, except for football. We love to pull for our favorite racecar driver as they race around the track in their Ford, Chevy, Dodge, and Toyota. Yes...Toyota.

When Toyota began competing in NASCAR, some fans frowned upon what they referred to as the beginning of a “Toyota invasion” and groaned about it because Toyota was not an American made car. Invasion? Not American? Really? Let’s take a closer look.

In 1967 Toyota teamed up with Carroll Shelby to develop a race-modified Toyota 2000 GT for competition in the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) C-Production class, and in 1968 a Toyota 2000 GT from Shelby Racing records a victory in the Grand Prairie Grand Prix in Arkansas. In 1979, Toyota Racing Development (TRD) was established in California, USA.

In 1983, Toyota teamed up with Dan Gurney and the All-American Racers (AAR) to place the Toyota Celica in a professional road-racing competition. Gurney and AAR competed in the IMSA GTU “under-three-liter” category and won 10 races in three years.

After numerous sponsorships and victories, fast-forward to 1999 where Toyota reaches an agreement to provide engines to the Target/Chip Ganassi Racing team for the 2000 CART season and in 2000, they scored their first victory at the Milwaukee Mile with driver Juan Pablo Montoya and Target/Chip Ganassi Racing.

From there, Toyota supported its first NASCAR entry in the Goody’s Dash Series with Eric Van Cleef (Van Cleef Racing) driving the No. 82 Toyota Celica and in 2001 they reached an agreement with Robert Huffman, three-time defending series champion, to drive a Toyota Celica in the 2001 NASCAR Goody’s Dash Series. Huffman went on to win Toyota’s first NASCAR victory in the 2003 Goody’s Dash Series race at Kentucky Speedway and took his Celica to a second win at Daytona.

In 2002, NASCAR rolled out the mat for Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. Inc., to compete in the Camping World Truck Series. Toyota began development on its full-size truck, the Tundra, to compete in the series. In 2004, the Toyota Tundra makes its NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race debut at Daytona International Speedway. Travis Kvapil finished second in that race but went on to take the victory in July of 2004 when Toyota earned its first NASCAR Camping World Truck Series victory, and they have gone on to win numerous races and victories racing the Toyota powered Tundra trucks.

In 2006, Toyota announced its entry into the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series and Nationwide Series as a competitor in 2007 using the Camry with Sprint Cup teams Bill Davis Racing, Red Bull Racing Team, and Michael Waltrip Racing.

Since 2008, Denny Hamlin, Tony Stewart, Joey Logano (who made history as the youngest race-winner at 18 years old when he won the NASCAR Nationwide Series at Kentucky Speedway) David Reutimann, and Kyle Busch have all crossed the finish line as winners in the Toyota Camry.

Toyota is as American as apple pie. The Toyota Camry and the Toyota Tundra are manufactured and assembled in America, by Americans, for Americans. In fact, Toyota Motor Manufacturing in San Antonio, Texas is responsible for making the Tacoma and the Tundra, they employ 2,464 team members and indirectly employ 13,496 local suppliers and dealers, and Toyota has an investment of 2.1 billion in the state of Texas.

The Toyota Camry is manufactured and assembled at Toyota Motor Manufacturing in Georgetown, Kentucky where 7,000 team members are employed, and 20,000 suppliers and dealers benefit from Toyota's presence. Toyota has an investment in the state of Kentucky of 5.7 billion. Along with the Camry, the Venza and Avalon are also manufactured at this plant.

It is fair to mention that Toyota Motor Manufacturing in Blue Springs, Mississippi manufactures and assembles the Corolla and the plant in Princeton, Indiana manufactures and assembles the Sienna, Sequoia, and Highlander. The Mississippi plant directly employs 2,000 team members and indirectly employs 2,227 dealers and suppliers. The Indiana plant directly employs 4,100 and indirectly employs 10,663 suppliers and dealers.

To put this in perspective, Toyota plants in America that manufacture and assemble vehicles employ (all total) 61,950 Americans! This does not include TRD or the American engine manufacturing plants and beyond and the untold number of employees they have put to work here in the U.S.

As of 2012, the Toyota Camry served as the official pace car for the 54th running of the Daytona 500 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race on Sunday, Feb. 26 – the first time that the manufacturer has served as the pace car for a NASCAR Sprint Cup race at Daytona

International Speedway. As of the 2012 Daytona 500 there were 11 Toyotas out of the 43 cars that qualified to compete in the race. The remaining 32 teams were divided between Ford, Chevy, and Dodge. This proves to average the presence of Toyota as *equal* to its competition in the racing arena of today. It is clear to see that Toyota has earned its rightful place among the ranks of the great American stockcars. Toyota continues on its path and is forever—Moving Forward.

Ed Laukes, TMS corporate manager of Motorsports Marketing said this: “We’re thrilled to be able to feature the new Camry in Daytona at the season’s biggest race. We think the Daytona 500 is the perfect place to showcase the all-new Camry – which will go on sale this fall. We knew when the opportunity arose to partner together with Daytona that it would be an extraordinary way to highlight our new Camry, as well as reinforce Toyota’s commitment to NASCAR and its fans.”

That’s about as American as you can get. Now, just don’t let this article tempt you to be driving like a racecar driver or running moonshine: drive responsibly.

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