

autobuzz

'Beautiful Corolla'

Afghanistan's enduring love affair with Toyota



Toyota Corolla cars in a traffic jam beneath the kot-e Sangi bridge in Kabul.

AFP | Kabul

Little is certain in Afghanistan -- armies invade and retreat, governments rise and fall -- but when the key of a Toyota Corolla turns in the ignition, the engine can be relied upon to roar to life.

A humble Japanese runabout with a reliable albeit unglamorous reputation, the Toyota Corolla is said to be the world's most popular car, with over 50 million trundling off production lines since 1966.

Sturdy, uncomplicated and affordable, it is finely tuned for a nation where roads dissolve into punishing terrain, repairs rely on frayed supply chains, and a "make do" mentality has emerged from decades of hardship.

"These cars have always been there for people," says mechanic Mohammad Aman. "If you travel with these cars, they can take you anywhere."

"The Corolla is quick, their metal is bold, they work well," the 50-year-old told AFP. Other cars "are flimsy like paper" by comparison, he insists.

In Afghanistan, Corollas are virtually ubiquitous.

Fleets of the suburban mainstay sell on forecourts overlooked by rusted Soviet troop carriers. Corolla taxis with pummeled bodywork jounce past humvees immobilised since US forces withdrew in 2021.

Even hauling up a mountain in a 4X4 you may be overtaken by a careening Corolla driver.

And Afghans everywhere emblazon their vehicles with English-language tributes romanticising the brand: "Happiness is a Toyota feeling", "Toyota sets the standard" and "Beautiful Corolla" have become the unofficial slogans of Kabul's grinding traffic jams.

'Special craze'

Corollas flooded Afghanistan

after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the USSR -- before which Moscow's state-owned Lada brand dominated the market.

They have had a background role in national history ever since.

Over the Taliban's 20-year insurgency, the Corolla became the vehicle of choice for car bombers.

Expendably cheap and camouflaged in plain sight, they were packed with explosives and rammed into targets with devastating effects.

In 2022, after American forces had pulled out, Taliban authorities boasted about a new Afghan-designed sports car: a supposed symbol of progress.

But under its sleek, aerodynamic exterior were the mechanical innards of a modest Corolla. Everywhere, sprawling families cram into the car, with passengers far outnumbering seats.

"In other countries everything

is used in the way it's intended," said auto dealer Azizullah Nazari. "But in Afghanistan people don't care much about such standards."

The 39-year-old has sold imported Corollas to suit any budget -- \$1,500 to \$14,000 -- and many seem to have taken a circuitous route to the country.

He points to a pristine white model apparently originating from Canada. Its interior is lined with Korean newspaper and it has a Ghanaian number plate.

Another has a bumper sticker from a US university; one more has the incongruous coat of arms of a district in central Germany.

But all their roads have led to Afghanistan, where "people have a special craze for Toyota", Nazari insists.

'Top and fantastic car'

Such is Afghans' faith in the car that the capital's largest repair market is not served by paved roads.

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When Washington launched air strikes after the 9/11 attacks, Taliban founder Mullah Omar fled his Kandahar hideaway in a white Corolla. It was buried in 2001 but triumphantly excavated last year "still in good condition", a Taliban government spokesman said, adding it should be publicly displayed as a "great historical monument".

stone, a peeling "fantastic Corolla" decal stuck to the window.

Next door, others fiddle with tendrils of wiring in the footwell of a Corolla adorned with cursive verse: "HighSpeed Toyota. Top and fantastic car in the world. Compatible with all condition."

A dull green model nearby is improbably branded "Dramatic Classic Car".

Out in Kabul's afternoon traffic, 27-year-old cab driver Naqeebullah pilots a sun-bleached Corolla three years his senior as he scouts for fares.

He estimates 80 percent of vehicles on the road match his.

"All cars have failed to show results apart from the Toyota Corolla," he puts it simply.

Swaying from his rearview mirror is a prayer card. "Glorified be the one who has made this means of transport subservient to us," it reads.

Ford to open orders on F-150 Trucks amid production snags

Reuters

Ford Motor Co said that it will open orders for its popular F-150 Lightning truck next week as part of their plan to scale to annual production of 150,000 units.

Ford is facing another production snag on the F-150 pickup trucks due to missing door handles, a source told Reuters on Wednesday.

The company faced a production snag in February after a battery fire. Production re-



A model of the all-new Ford F-150 Lightning electric pickup

sumed in March.

While a supplier part shortage is affecting some of our North American plants, we expect to make up all of the production that is impacted," the automaker said in an emailed statement on Wednesday.

BYD to make EVs in Vietnam

Reuters | Hanoi

Chinese automaker BYD Co. (002594.SZ) plans to expand into electric vehicles manufacturing and assembly in Vietnam, according to a Vietnamese government statement citing the company's chair.

In a government statement released after the meeting between BYD's founder and chair Wang Chuanfu and Deputy Prime Minister Tran Hong Ha on May 5, Wang said he expected Vietnam to create favourable conditions for BYD



BYD electric vehicles (EV) are displayed at a car dealership in Shanghai

to complete investment procedures.

The statement did not mention how much new investment BYD would top up for the expansion.

Bentley production chief to lead Volkswagen's software overhaul

Reuters

Volkswagen (VOWG_p.DE) has appointed Bentley production chief Peter Bosch to lead its software subsidiary Cariad, dismissing all but one of the unit's current executive board members as the automaker tries to get the troubled division on track.

Bosch will take over from June 1, the German group said on Monday, with two further software experts to join Cariad's board alongside him and

human resources head Rainer Zugehoer, the only board member to remain in his post.

Bosch, a former Oliver Wyman consultant who spent nearly seven years at the Volkswagen brand before moving to Bentley in 2017, will also take over financial management at Cariad, Volkswagen said, confirming an earlier Handelsblatt report.

"He is a strategist, an enabler and a team player," Volkswagen CEO Oliver Blume said of Bosch in a statement.