

Two Toyota Leaders Recognized by MotorTrend as ‘Software-Defined Vehicle’ Innovators

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LAS VEGAS and PLANO, Texas (Jan. 9, 2023) – With the seismic shift moving the automotive industry to become more connected, automated and electric than ever before, software is taking a leading role in redefining how customers interact with their vehicles. Toyota today announced that MotorTrend has named two executive leaders within Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) Connected Technologies and [Toyota Connected North America](#) (TCNA) as part of its first class of software-defined vehicle innovators.

[Steve Basra](#), group vice president of Connected Technologies at TMNA; president and chief executive officer at TCNA; and board member for Toyota Connected India, Toyota Connected Europe and TCNA, has been with Toyota organizations in the U.S. and Europe since 1998 and earned a spot on MotorTrend’s list of software-defined vehicle leaders. Basra’s dual-capped role within TMNA and TCNA, brings together software designers, engineers and developers to help redefine experiences Toyota and Lexus drivers enjoy in their vehicles and through mobile applications.

Basra’s leadership has been crucial toward technology advancements made in occupant safety and natural speech assistant technologies.

Alongside him, TCNA’s Vice President of Engineering Dave Tsai was named as a Domain Expert, helping develop TCNA’s culture by merging Toyota quality with Silicon Valley-style software development best practices. Additionally, Tsai has worked with TCNA’s People Operations team to create career paths for engineers to have engaging paths where they can continue to grow professionally and develop technologies that have the potential to reach millions of customers around the world.

Tsai helped bring safety and telematics systems in-house under Toyota engineers, contributing toward saving hundreds of millions of dollars and increasing up time.

Basra and Tsai were among the earliest members of TCNA in 2016 after Toyota Motor Company President Akio Toyoda announced the formation of Toyota Connected mobility and data services companies. Among their first projects at the time was to build a concept of what their ideal in-vehicle experience would be, taking a Lexus NX and completely reimagining its interior.

“Then, we brought many of the ideas we learned in that concept to life with our latest Toyota Audio Multimedia and Lexus Interface infotainment systems found in many 2022 and 2023 vehicles,” said Basra. “The teams we built created our first infotainment and voice-command technologies designed specifically for North American audiences. We’re thankful for those who believed in our vision and the many Connected Technologies and Toyota Connected team members who tirelessly worked to bring customers a truly first-class experience from behind the wheel.”

Working within TCNA, they established the [Drivelink telematics services provider](#) (TSP), which powers Toyota and Lexus Safety Connect telematics services. Since it launched in 2019, the TSP has been activated in more than 6 million vehicles in North America, answering more than 3 million customer calls including more than 14,000 vehicle accidents – many of which connected drivers and passengers with first responders.

By bringing their TSP in-house, engineers were able to more readily help customers, roll-out software updates more efficiently and decrease operating costs so that the savings could be instead invested in innovation projects. Drivelink’s underlying code is now being shared by Toyota Connected companies in India, Australia and elsewhere.

Complementing Drivelink, the new-generation Toyota [Audio Multimedia](#) and [Lexus Interface](#) are notable for being the first of the brands’ infotainment systems to have over-the-air updates as well as cloud-connectivity that has brought them a number of enhancements. The systems also integrate a Voice Assistant, which uses “Hey Toyota/Hey Lexus” wake words and can control climate, audio, navigation and even windshield wipers in select

vehicles.

“Toyota vehicles are known for being there when our customers need us,” said Tsai. “It is our job to uphold that reputation with the digital services we’re creating as well. However we engage customers – whether in the vehicle, through a phone app or even in the metaverse, we want customers to enjoy the peace of mind that comes with a Toyota experience.”

Teams are already beginning development of future infotainment systems that will further TMNA Connected Technologies and TCNA’s role in the software-defined vehicle. Many of the new features and functionality being rolled out come as a direct result of how customers use their vehicles – and how Toyota companies envision the quickly approaching world of shared mobility. Toyota has kept a keen eye toward developing core strengths with technology and working with partners where it makes sense.

“No matter what, Toyota and Lexus customers are always at the forefront of everything we do,” said Basra. “Technology will progress. Cars will change. But the trust customers have in our vehicles will always drive every decision we make.”

MotorTrend introduced its first class of Software-Defined Vehicle Innovators during the 2023 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. More information about the awards can be found here:

<https://www.motortrend.com/news/winners-motortrend-software-defined-vehicle-innovator-sdvi-awards/>.