A Legendary Land Cruiser Concept Returns Toyota’s Booth at SEMA

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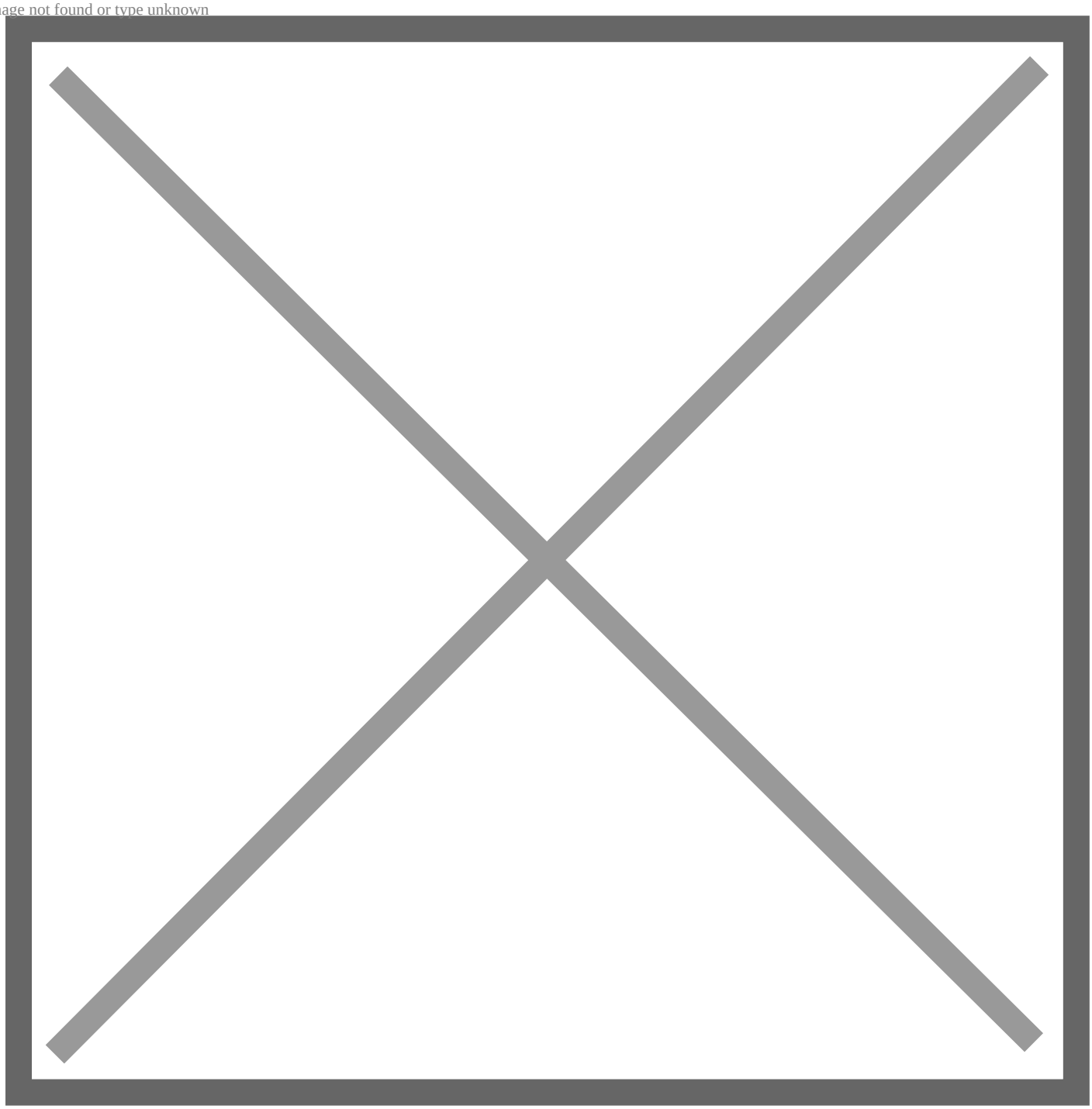

LAS VEGAS (Oct. 31, 2023) – The Toyota Land Cruiser has a pedigree spanning more than seven decades. With an international following and fanatics found across the globe, the Land Cruiser enjoys truly legendary status as the go anywhere, do anything SUV.

In celebration of Land Cruiser's triumphant return to North America for the 2024 model year, Toyota unsealed the vault to showcase one of the most famous Land Cruiser customs ever built: the Rod Millen Group's 1967 FJ45 Land Cruiser Wagon, dubbed The Retro Cruiser.

The Retro Cruiser, which will be shown at the Toyota booth at SEMA from Oct. 31–Nov. 3, is not a mere show car concept. Inspired in 1999 by a "what if" conversation between Toyota Motor Sales' senior managers and racing legend Rod Millen, the idea was to showcase the latest Land Cruiser technology while honoring the nameplate's rich heritage.

"Not only is it a cool truck, but it's also an extremely well-built truck," said Marty Schwerter, Toyota Motorsports garage team manager and leader of the team responsible for getting the venerable Retro Cruiser freshened up and ready for SEMA. "They made this concept to be used in the dirt, with all the rugged looks of the old '67 FJ style but with the luxury of the 100 Series, which was the ultimate Toyota comfort car in the early 2000s."

Starting out as a $5,000 vehicle "in need of some love," they stretched the frame by an additional 10 inches, and modified the body for a more muscular presence and several significant performance enhancements. One of the most remarkable aspects of the Retro Cruiser is its suspension system.

The team wanted to leverage as many production Land Cruiser components as possible, however, the choice was made to improve ride comfort and custom build an independent rear suspension with coil-over spring/shock assemblies. Then the front track was widened by 4 inches, resulting in a remarkable 30% increase in wheel travel. The team narrowed the stock differential and retained the original brakes and hubs while crafting custom uprights, upgrades that collectively allowed for an impressive 12 inches of rear-wheel travel. The Retro Cruiser rolls on bespoke, 17-inch billet wheels mounted with rugged, 35-inch, General Tire® Grabbers. Underneath, custom skid plates add an extra layer of protection.

The Retro Cruiser got a power boost by way of a 100 Series Land Cruiser's robust 230-horsepower, 4.7L, 32-valve DOHC V-8 engine, complete with a four-speed automatic transmission, transfer case, and locking differentials. A custom-designed Borla® stainless steel exhaust gives the V8 engine a more aggressive exhaust note.

Retro Cruiser's rugged-looking exterior belies a decidedly luxurious interior complete with a range of contemporary Land Cruiser components and surfaces, many of which have been upgraded with Connolly® leather. In addition to the standard power accessories, the inclusion of a satellite phone, navigation system, and a substantial 15-gallon onboard water supply further highlights its versatility and preparedness for extended adventures. This retro-modern masterpiece also boasts a complete interior roll cage, increasing the vehicle's structural rigidity.

To prepare the Retro Cruiser for this year's SEMA Show, the Toyota team went through the FJ45 from top to bottom, replacing worn items and aged components. This included addressing leaking shocks, rotted hoses, reviving the fuel system, and a few old fitment issues.

Once the mechanical systems had been meticulously restored, the Retro Cruiser made its way to Complete Customs®, which focused on refreshing the exterior. The vehicle was stripped down to bare metal before being sprayed in the original color, restoring the vehicle to look just as it did at initial completion in 1999.

“For 2024, Land Cruiser will honor its heritage of being able to go anywhere on the planet, but will get back to its roots, offering accessibility to an even broader spectrum of customers eager to explore the backcountry,” said Mike Tripp, group vice president, Toyota Marketing. “Vehicles like Retro Cruiser are a testament to Land Cruiser’s iconic status as our longest-running nameplate. By showing it at SEMA we hope to inspire an entirely new generation of Land Cruiser Lovers.”

Rod Millen’s Retro Cruiser is one of 19 accessorized vehicles, builds and concepts featured by Toyota at SEMA. This year’s product display theme: ***Track or Trail, Your Thrill Awaits*** foreshadows a Toyota brand presence that features some of the most exciting on-and-off-road performance vehicles ever built as part of a show footprint that represents Toyota’s largest SEMA presence to date.

Vehicle referenced is a special project prototype vehicle, modified with parts and/or accessories not available from Toyota that may void the vehicle’s warranty, may negatively impact vehicle performance and safety, and may not be street legal.