

A chat with Honda Malaysia Yoichero Euno at the Tokyo Motor Show – Leading through turbulent times

Honda Malaysia is no longer on the “runway” and President and CEO Yoichero Ueno has enough “fuel” for the long haul.

It was one catastrophe after another since taking office in early 2011 from administering the local product recall involving over 23,000 3rd generation City and 2nd generation Jazz cars, through the aftermath and destruction of the Tsunami in Japan mid-way of the year, culminating with the Thai floods late 2011.

If the number of hair on a head is a measure of the challenges one is posed with, Uenosan will take the cake when compared against other motor CEO's in Malaysia.

A long-time friend and owner of a Honda dealership in Subang Jaya is the envy of business owners of other brands today when he proudly shares the care and support extended by Honda Malaysia during the trying times. “Honda supported our business with incentives and cash flow management which was most appreciated by business owners in 2011. Unlike the business models of the 2 other brands, Honda mainly operates through independent dealers, so there is no favouritism when a principal has direct interest in the retail business” he added.

Interestingly the relationship Honda Malaysia has with the dealers and the future positive outlook is echoed with what is happening in the local market. Word has it that the recent advertisement for new dealers by Honda Malaysia had been very quickly taken up by entrepreneurs, who similarly see the potential business and strength of the brand ahead of them.

Yet, meeting Euno and his PR team at the Tokyo Motor show recently, I was pleasantly surprised how modestly content he was overcoming one challenge after another when reflecting his early years since taking office in Kuala Lumpur.

“You’ll never hear Eunosan say “I” in his conversation. He was proud of what the team and dealers have collectively accomplished since then” shared Akhbar Daniel, Head of PR; when referring to his boss’s style of management.

With Ueno at the helm, Honda Malaysia has established a more prominent position in the eyes of Honda Asia Oceania office. Investment up to 2 billion have been expended in capacity building such as the second assembly plant in Melaka (preparing for a wider range of models range emphasizing importance on energy efficient products in line with Malaysia's aspirations) and beefing up Hyundai's Asia Pacific R&D activities. This is where it matters most in the local automotive industry, many Malaysian automotive experts have championed.

Of particular interest to the retail business is the setting up of Aftersales training academy in PJ and relocation Honda Parts Centre to bigger facility. It was heartening to know that Service Managers from the dealer network was also featured in the recent dealer incentive trip to the Tokyo Motor Show. Equally noteworthy is the Honda's Malaysia's foray in the local racing scene with the support and involvement with staff from the dealer team.

With the average tenure of a Honda senior executive position limited to 3 years, Ueno's time clock seems to be ticking closer. For an avid marathon runner and one who strives on long term perspective, much of Euno's fruits and already bearing fruits in line of the strategic initiatives the company has put in place during the tough times.

"Given the opportunity, I would love to stay on and see growth plan of Honda's 100,000 targeted vehicle sales realized by the end of 2016. We have got an interesting product mix coming (as witnessed at the Tokyo show) and supported by one of the best dealership network who will *live our dream* in tandem" shared Euno enthusiastically.

Not only have sales almost double two-fold from the historical low in 2011 of 32,482 to projected sales of 55, 000 this year, but Honda continues to remain among the top Japanese brand in satisfying customer consistently from 2010 in Malaysia.

Going by the recent showing in Honda's efforts, "put your seat belts on" and braze yourself for an interesting journey ahead.