

“Technology Goes on Parade”
06/01/2005

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Toyota City – Toyota Motor Corp. rolled out the red carpet here today for the West Virginia trade mission, treating Sen. Jay Rockefeller and Gov. Joe Manchin to five hours of eye-popping technology. It was such a show that the governor couldn't resist hopping into a racecar simulator and going for a ride. After a four-course lunch, the West Virginians toured a Toyota exhibition hall that explains Toyota's work in the areas of environmental protection, vehicle safety, manufacturing and motor sports. Greeting the guests at the entrance was a robot that played a trumpet and danced.

First Lady Gayle Manchin got a kick out of operating a “future personal mobility vehicle” that looks like a dentist's chair with wheels or an alien spacecraft. Gov. Manchin had private meetings with Toyota officials during the tour and missed his wife's exploits. However, when he heard there was a Formula One racecar in the exhibit, he jogged to take a look. After inspecting the sleek red-and-white racecar, the governor spied a Formula One simulator nearby. “Can I drive that?” he asked. Within minutes he was in the vehicle, looking at a screen in front of him that depicted a road course. He “drove” the course without incident, clearly enjoying himself.

Later in the day, it was obvious he also had a good time zooming up and down a Toyota test track in a hybrid vehicle. In addition to showing off several of its hybrids, Toyota demonstrated a vehicle equipped with an “Intelligent Parking Assistant” that allows the driver to parallel park automatically. Once the car's electronic parking system is set, the vehicle actually parks itself. The driver needs only to apply the brakes with the car finishes steering itself backwards into a parking space.