

sustainable japan

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At Volvo Car Japan, it's safety first for all of humanity

Roundtable

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Volvo Cars already has a high reputation for safety and reliability, but for Nico Mira, Volvo Car Japan's head of sustainability and projects, the company's stylish new fleet of all-electric cars bear a far more urgent responsibility: safety for all humanity.

"We make cars for humans," explained the enthusiastic young executive. "Therefore the priority always needs to be on safety — but for Volvo to take that safety seriously, we need to also take sustainability seriously, because that's now the safety for the entire planet."

Mira recognizes that the automotive industry is a primary emitter of greenhouse gases and believes it has a unique responsibility to ameliorate the blight: "The biggest contribution for Volvo is to phase out the internal combustion engine and move towards only battery electric vehicles." Mira knows that the timeline for the car industry to reduce tailpipe emissions to avoid the worst effects of climate change is daunting but is hopeful that Volvo Cars can play an important part.

Mira took time out of his busy schedule to sit down with Ross Rowbury for the 34th iteration of The Japan Times' Sustainability Roundtable, a monthly series of English-language events, to talk about sustainability in the car industry, the future

direction of Volvo Cars and how he ended up in Japan.

Awakened by nature

"My passion and engagement in sustainability comes a lot from my background," Mira explained. "I grew up in a tiny rural village in Sweden, my backyard was a forest and nature was always close to me." Despite the idyllic childhood, often spotting deer, foxes and the occasional moose on his walk to school, he always felt drawn to the world beyond. "My mother is Swedish and my father is Filipino, so I was always aware that whatever was happening in Sweden was perhaps not the case in other parts of the world."

Mira's bicultural upbringing sparked his interest in global social issues, leading him to complete a bachelor's degree in political science that included studies in Asia. "Asia's the largest region in the world in terms of size and population, with the quickest-growing markets as well, so I knew if I wanted to make a change and have an impact, Asia was the region I needed to go to."

A multidisciplinary solution

Mira arrived in Japan as an exchange student in 2016, a year after the Paris Agreement was signed, and with so much in the news about the environment and sustainability at the time, it reinvigorated his interest in the fate of the planet. "The realization was that while we have a lot of



Nico Mira is Volvo Car Japan's head of sustainability and projects. YUICO TAIYA

social issues that we have to work with, the most pressing issue of the day is climate change — if we don't preserve our home planet, it's not worth doing anything else."

Wanting to make a difference, Mira enrolled at Sophia University to get a master's degree in global studies. "The program was very broad and focused on problems and solutions. You can't solve climate change by focusing on any one single discipline; it's a global problem and you need to take a holistic view."

Driven by holistic values

Soon after graduation, Mira found himself at Volvo Car Japan, first as its sustainability coordinator before moving to be head of sustainability and the projects office, but not without some initial trepidation and skepticism about joining the corporate world to work in the car industry. "We learned in school that companies very rarely live up to their sustainability goals, so before joining Volvo I was a bit wary of greenwashing," he said. "Are they really doing what they say they are doing? I

asked myself, because the profit-seeking motive is often at odds with the environment." Mira soon felt confident that Volvo Car Japan was driven by values, believing that a company that placed primacy on safety could not then neglect its commitment to sustainability.

Mira gave examples of Volvo Car Japan's holistic approach to sustainability, including its approach to ensuring procurement of climate-neutral electricity for its retail network. "The question is, how do we quickly move from electricity that's generated from fossil fuels to renewable sources, when supply in Japan so far is limited?" he said. "A first step is making sure that we have all our dealers on board, by encouraging them to procure non-fossil certificates covering their whole electricity consumption. And when all dealers achieve that, it means we have established a new standard which then becomes a new normal. Next step thereafter is accelerating installation of photovoltaic solar. We are going fully electric by 2030, but we also have to support the Volvo dealers and the charging infrastructure to manage the transition."

Sustainability at core

Mira took time to introduce Volvo Cars' newest model, the EX30, as an example of the company's manufacturing future, which he hopes other carmakers will try to emulate. "The EX30 is our smallest SUV, but it's also a big deal."

He explained that the EX30 has the lowest carbon footprint across its life cycle, from production to disposal. This is achieved by using 25% recycled aluminum, 17% recycled steel and 17% recycled plastics, manufactured in factories with 100% climate neutral electricity and commitment of around 95% of Tier 1 suppliers to use 100% renewable energy by 2025.

"It's also the most affordable battery electric model we currently have, because at the end of the day, we need to get people into switching to electric vehicles, and this is the



The EX30 is Volvo's smallest car, but also the one that has the lowest carbon emissions YUICO TAIYA

model that can help us achieve that."

Driving into the future

Despite the strong lead from the car industry, Mira believes the government has an important role to play in the transition to sustainability and is encouraged by the Japanese government's recent announcement on doubling the number of charging stations in the country to 300,000 by 2030. However, he questions Japan's eco-friendly vehicle target for 2035, as it will still include hybrid vehicles. "Hybrids predominately run on an internal combustion engine, so that's not the most stringent target."

Mira concedes that it is a challenge for Volvo Car Japan to compete with well-established Japanese car manufacturers in terms of sales volume, but hopes that it will be able to lead as an example of sustainability. "We have to be a guide, not a gatekeeper, on sustainability and share the knowledge that we have — let's decide on our future together by deliberation, not by decree."

Roundtable is a monthly series of English-language events organized by The Japan Times Cube. For more information or to assist to a Roundtable, scan the QR code or visit <https://sustainable.japan-times.com/roundtable>

VOLVO



Mira and host Ross Rowbury discussed with the attendees the importance of achieving a more carbon-efficient automotive industry while keeping safety as a main priority. YUICO TAIYA

Times Gallery



French Ambassador Philippe Setton and Councillor Seiko Hashimoto pose with athletes Natsumi Tsunoda, Hidefumi Wakayama and Shuzo Matsuo at a press conference on Oct. 11. EMBASSY OF FRANCE



Tibor Csaba Szendrei, the charge d'affaires ad interim at the Embassy of Hungary, and Hironobu Takagi, the executive director of the Mirai museum of emerging science and innovation, speak at the opening of an exhibition on Kariko Katalin. EMBASSY OF HUNGARY



Brazilian Ambassador Octavio Henrique Cortes poses with producers from the Brazilian Specialty Coffee Association during their participation in Japan's coffee conference on Sept. 29. Brazil is the world's largest producer of coffee. EMBASSY OF BRAZIL



Kenyan Ambassador Tabu Irina leads the embassy in hosting a Fun Run in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Kenya-Japan diplomatic relations on Sept. 24 at the Tokyo Rinkai Disaster Prevention Park. EMBASSY OF KENYA



The speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Puan Maharani (center, in dress), stands with Ambassador Heri Akhmadi and other guests at Indonesia's Independence Day Diplomatic Reception at the ambassador's residence on Oct. 11. EMBASSY OF INDONESIA



The Kyoto Peacebuilding Center, together with the Global Peacebuilding Association of Japan and the Academic Council on the United Nations System, holds an event on Kosovo Ambassador Sabri Kicmari's book on Sept. 29. EMBASSY OF KOSOVO



A delegation from the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Forum of Parliamentarians meet former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, current chairman of the Japan-India Association. EMBASSY OF INDIA



Over 170 kayakers and canoeists gather at the 2023 Moldova Cup in the Yamagata city of Nishikawa on Sept. 17. Ambassador Dumitru Socolan awarded prizes to the winners. EMBASSY OF MOLDOVA

Asics races to ensure well-being of both people and the planet

Sustainable Japan Awards: Grand Prize winner

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Asics Corp. was founded in 1949 with the goal of providing hope to children who were facing challenges or going astray amid the devastation of postwar Japan. Its name derives from the Latin proverb "Anima sana in corpore sano" ("A sound mind in a sound body").

The company specializes in sporting goods and is renowned worldwide for its high-performance running shoes. Since its inception, its vision has been to promote both mental and physical health through sports, and that remains central to its corporate philosophy to this day. Its sustainability efforts, in addition, were highly recognized at Sustainable Japan Day 2023, hosted by The Japan Times in September, where it received the Grand Prize in the ESG (environmental, social and governance) category.

Global warming poses a significant threat to the environment, including places where people enjoy sports. Asics is steadfast in its mission to ensure a safe environment for people to enjoy sports in the future. It is deeply committed to environmental awareness and actively engages in specific initiatives to uphold this.

The company's sustainability efforts have two main pillars: People and Planet. The People pillar focuses on contribut-

ing to individuals and society, emphasizing promoting healthy minds and bodies through business initiatives. The Planet pillar is dedicated to environmental stewardship, ensuring a sustainable global environment where sports can be enjoyed in the future.

As part of its commitment to people, the company has introduced an app named Runkeeper. It serves as a comprehensive guide for runners, assisting them throughout the entire marathon journey, from buying shoes and training to registering for races, book accommodation and traveling to events. By making running more accessible and allowing athletes to customize their training to their individual needs, the company leverages digital services to promote health and enhance the overall running experience.

Furthermore, Asics is delving into research to explore the effects of sports on mental health. In 2022, the company undertook a study across 16 countries to probe the correlation between physical activity and mental well-being. The survey's findings showed that men engaged in an average of 180 minutes of exercise per week, and women clocked in at 140 minutes. Intriguingly, the mental health scores for women were observed to be lower than those for men. The data suggests that individuals who maintain regular physical activity tend to exhibit greater mental stability, increased energy and heightened resilience to stress.

In addressing environmental concerns, the company aims for net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, with an intermediate target of cutting emissions across its value chain by at least 63% by 2030. The company strategized to collaborate with suppliers in advancing the adoption of renewable energy.

As part of this initiative, the Gel-Lyte III CM 1.95 sneaker, with the lowest emissions of any sneakers, based on available industry data for life cycle CO2e emissions as of Sep 2023, was launched in September. The sneaker has a carbon footprint of 1.95 kilograms per pair. This is groundbreaking considering that carbon emissions are typically 8 kg for a pair of sneakers and 12.5 kg for running shoes.

This impressively low carbon footprint was achieved through the ingenious use

of raw materials derived from sugarcane. During its growth, the sugarcane absorbs carbon dioxide, and remarkably, this absorbed CO2 surpasses the emissions produced during the manufacturing process, yielding a carbon-negative foam material. The company successfully undertakes sustainable product manufacturing without compromising on quality or functionality.

Furthermore, Asics has initiated a drive to transparently visualize the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions from its products, aiming to elevate the awareness of consumers and facilitate reductions in their carbon footprints. The company has already introduced this emissions labeling on specific models of running shoes, including the Gel-Kayano 30 and the GT-2000. While the emphasis in the past was predominantly on speed and performance, runners have increasingly demanded sustainability attributes from brands as well.

Asics champions corporate sustainability through its pioneering product development. Embracing challenges and fostering innovation, it is unwavering in its journey toward a sustainable future, grounded in its twin pillars of sustainability. Central to its efforts is a resolute commitment to delivering high-quality, functional products and services without compromising on environmental considerations. This ethos fuels Asics' trailblazing approach to sustainable innovation.

The Sustainable Japan Award commends individuals, companies and organizations who have made advances in sustainable efforts. To learn more, scan the QR code or visit <https://sustainable.japan-times.com/sjaward2023>



Minako Yoshikawa, Asics sustainability head ASICS



Gel-Lyte III CM 1.95 sneaker — the lightest CO2 emissions sneaker on the market. This version evolves the Gel-Lyte III OG silhouette to minimize its impact on the planet without compromising on quality or design. ASICS