



Toyota Helps Blind Doctor Achieve His Track Driving Dream

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A blind driver has set the fifth fastest time around television's most famous test track.

Dr Amit Patel lost his sight six years ago, but proved he still has an instinct for rapid, precision driving when he powered around a Surrey circuit used to test cars in the world's most famous TV car show.

Amit's time of one minute 46.58 seconds would put him fifth amongst the famous faces who have driven around this circuit on the programme.

Amit's remarkable story is captured in a new Toyota short film which can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/UYfQohgq7ok>.

As an NHS first-response medic, Amit was skilled in safe, fast driving in emergency situations until his career was cut short by sudden and complete sight loss.

His determination to not let his blindness hold him back is a perfect expression of *Start Your Impossible*, Toyota's global campaign that encourages people to overcome their hurdles to mobility and personal achievement. *Start Your Impossible* reflects Toyota's evolution from a vehicle manufacturer to a mobility provider and supports its eight-year partnership with the International Olympic and Paralympic Committees.

Getting back into the driving seat was a big step for Amit, who explained he experiences the world completely differently from how did as a sighted person.

"It's been six years or so since I've been behind the wheel of a car, but it's funny how things come back to you – the sound of the engine, the gear changes, the clutch and the brake. But then driving, and not knowing where you're driving, that's the insane part," he said.

To guide him through his track laps he had the expert help of Mark Watkins, a performance driving instructor who is experienced in working on-track with blind and partially sighted people. He said: "Amit was immediately natural behind the wheel. What impressed me all the way through was how he was just so smooth."

Mark provided constant guidance on steering, acceleration and braking from the passenger seat, changing his tone of voice to encourage Amit as he became more confident and the lap times tumbled. There were no dual controls; Amit had sole control of the vehicle.

“I focused on the instructions, concentrating on what Mark was saying,” said Amit. “I tend to forget that I can’t see, it was crazy just to think that I was actually doing this. Being on the test track, driving the GT86, it was a dream come true.”

Amit and Mark worked together on an initial test session in a Toyota Yaris before graduating to the GT86 and making a date for the timed laps at the Dunsfold track, near Guildford.

Reflecting on his achievement, Amit paid tribute to the support of his wife and young son. He said: “Blindness is always going to be in my life, but I don’t wake up in the morning and dwell on it, I just get on with it. That’s easy to say now, but five years ago it wasn’t. I have a wonderful wife who helped me out when I needed it and gave me the motivation, and we have an amazing two-and-a-half-year-old son. In my head I can see a smile on his face and I’m hoping that he’s proud of what his dad’s achieved.”

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