

Tuff Torq reaches assembly line milestone

BY JEAN HENDERSON Tribune Staff Writer

Five million and still mowing strong.

Tuff Torq Inc. in Morristown celebrated Monday as the five millionth lawn and garden tractor hydrostatic transmission rolled off the assembly line at its Morristown Airport Industrial District facility. Its appearance immediately garnered spontaneous applause from employees when it took its place on a display pedestal.

Tuff Torq came to Morristown in 1989 as one of the first international companies to move into MAID. Now standing at 225,000 square feet, the plant's 310 employees manufacture hydrostatic transmissions for the lawn and garden, off-highway and marine industries.

The transmission was officially presented to Tuff Torq President Koji Irikura by the seven employees with the longest terms with the company, Shirley Lawson, Bob Self, Bobby Turley, Chris McCamey, Donnie Anderson, Mark Cureton and Tammy Stanifer.

In recognition of the milestone, Irikura told employees, "I appreciate all your hard work and your efforts".

"This is a major milestone for our company. Due to our increased share of the hydrostatic market, we have produced these units much faster than ever before. We thank every Tuff Torq associate for their hard work, determination and commitment to reaching this goal," he said.

Irikura said the milestone was on a global scale—with consumers from around the world is using equipment manufactured in Morristown.

The completed unit was for a John Deere lawn tractor.

Greg Snyder, with John Deere Power Products, Greeneville, TN, was on hand for the celebration and said that Tuff Torq is "an integral part of our company's business."

"They have been very strategic for our business success and they are a company of great integrity," Snyder said. "We at John Deere salute their continued success and congratulate them on this accomplishment."

Frank Freeman, Tuff Torq sales and marketing manager, said the company was the first to integrate hydrostatic transmissions to the lawn and garden market. Now, he added, according to a major consumer reporting publication, eight out of the top 10 lawn and garden tractors utilize the company's drive systems.

Tuff Torq last celebrated a milestone in 2003 with the 2.5 millionth unit produced.

In addition to John Deere, the company manufactures equipment for Husqvarna, Craftsman, Simplicity and Snapper.

Tuff Torq's parent company, Kanzaki Kokyukoki, is located in Japan.

The unit and an employee-autographed poster will remain on display in the facility's lobby.