

Hello, and welcome back.

I'm Jim Tedder in Washington.

On today's program...they get you to the store quickly and quietly, they take you into the countryside for a nice weekend. But they also cost a lot of money to buy and to keep in good shape. And the cost of fuel? Forget about it!

Today's show is all about cars, and we will travel to Thailand and to the West Coast of the United States to hear what is going on.

This is As It Is, a program designed to help you learn and improve your English.

## **A Booming Car Industry in Thailand**

The automobile industry in Thailand is booming. In other words, it's doing very well! The industry is now the world's third-largest maker of commercial vehicles. Only the United States and China are ahead of it. Many foreign automakers are producing vehicles in Rayong for Southeast Asia's growing middle class.

Matt Bradley is regional president of Ford. He praised Thailand as a highly successful example for manufacturing.

“Thailand, I think, has made a concerted effort from government policy in the last 15 years to plan to support the automotive industry. Ford has been in Thailand about 17 years and just since 2007 we’ve invested over a billion dollars in our manufacturing and product cycle plant footprint in Thailand.”

The automotive area is now Thailand’s third largest industry. It has 12 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product and employs 400,000 workers.

As evidence of the industry’s success, roads in Bangkok are overflowing with cars. Government tax benefits for first-time buyers have sped up sales. But can these vehicles compete with those made in Japan, Europe or the United States?

Honda executive vice president Pitak Pruttisarikorn said the Japanese automaker was making high-quality vehicles in Thailand at a competitive cost.

“For Honda, cost efficiency is one of our key strategies. So we have established the good relationship with the strong and the highest quality parts suppliers, global suppliers and local suppliers.”

Some automakers operating in Thailand import critical parts, including engines, from overseas. But GM Powertrain plant manager Jennifer Bigelow said the American automaker not only puts together its engines locally. But she says they also get their components -- their parts -- in Thailand.

“It is definitely cost-effective. We reduce shipping costs, we develop partners here that we can then work with, and develop that partnership to help improve our engine and our product.”

Manufacturers must also produce their vehicles to meet area demand. The widespread availability of reasonably priced diesel fuel promotes the design of parts like four-cylinder diesel engines.

The situation for Thailand's strong auto production industry faces some challenges, however. That is true although it exports vehicles beyond Southeast Asia to Japan, the Middle East and North America.

Growth is limited by a shortage of labor in the country with nearly full employment. But that has led to opportunities for women, who make up nearly one-third of the workforce at some Thai auto plants.

And when extensive flooding in 2011 closed manufacturing plants and parts suppliers, Indonesia briefly overtook Thailand in production. That competition between the two countries is sure to continue for many years to come.

## **Fighting Traffic**

If you drive a car every day, you probably spend a lot of time stuck in traffic. We certainly do in the Washington, D.C. area. Faith Lapidus joins us now to tell about a scientist and a student who are trying to do something about it...

In the United States, Los Angeles and San Francisco tie for second place for having the worst traffic problems. Washington, D.C., is in first place with the worst traffic, according to the Texas A&M Transportation Institute.

In Los Angeles, drivers spend 61 hours every year stuck in traffic. These drivers know all too well how bad the traffic can be.

“It’s a prison of cars. There’s too many cars, you can’t move around a lot.”

“I get very frustrated. I try to listen to some music, maybe snap my fingers or something to try to pass the time.”

Professor Cyrus Shahabi also knows about traffic jams. He lives more than 65 kilometers from his office at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles. He is always late -- even with the help of a navigation system.

He and PhD student Ugur Demiryurek decided to develop an app for that. The ClearPath app claims to do what other navigation systems cannot. Professor Shahabi says his program uses historical data to predict traffic conditions even before the driver leaves the house.

“What’s unique is that we utilize a lot of data that’s currently become available including traffic data, weather data, and we analyze that so that we can predict what’s going to happen in front of you when you leave home.”

ClearPath uses two and a half year’s worth of traffic data from 9,000 sensors on the roads of Los Angeles. It also collects information on accidents.

“Now you are driving and there’s an accident in front of you, but the accident is 20 minutes away. And you know from historical data that that accident would clear by the time you get there. We can take that into account and send you towards the accident because we think by the time you get there, there wouldn’t be any accident.”

Professor Shahabi says his system does more than just respond to current traffic conditions. With ClearPath, he says, a driver can enter what time he wants to leave on a specific time and date, and ClearPath will give the fastest route. It looks at the entire road network, including surface streets as well as highways, before the driver hits the road.

Ugur Demiryurek says, in a year, he and Professor Shahabi hope to have ClearPath available nationwide and overseas once they can collect traffic data from other cities.

“I thought always that L.A. had the worst traffic, but now I know that Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, believe it or not, Singapore, Hong Kong definitely are examples that can immediately utilize this.”

Professor Shahabi hopes to license this new technology to companies that already have navigation systems, such as Google and Apple.

I'm Faith Lapidus.

Thank you, Faith. Let's hope his work is successful!

Before we drive on down the road, here is a bit of automobile history for you...

## **George B. Who?**

Have you ever heard of a man named George B. Selden? Well, 118 years ago this month, this New York lawyer received the legal right -- a patent -- to make automobiles. During his lifetime, he never made a single one. But he tried to make a lot of money by selling his legal right to others. Sounds like a good idea, doesn't it? Well, hold on. Into the story comes a gentleman by the name of Henry Ford, who went to court to challenge the patent. And in January of 1911, Mr. Ford won the case. The judge said Selden had used incorrect information when he asked for the original legal right to own the automobile manufacturing process. Disappointed, and a lot poorer, George Selden went into the truck business, and made them until he sold the company in 1930.

I'm Jim Tedder in Washington, and it is time for me to move aside and let some other Learning English programs pass. And



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