

## **NADA Show 2026 and US Dealer Study Tour Report**

In February 2026, NADA SA sent a delegation, led by NADA National Director Ashley Samuel, to attend the NADA Show 2026 in Las Vegas, USA, and to conduct follow-on dealer and NADA USA engagements in Washington DC and Tysons Corner, Virginia.

### **Objectives**

The primary purpose of the study tour was to deepen NADA South Africa's strategic understanding of global automotive retail trends, strengthen institutional relationships with international dealer associations, and benchmark the operational and advocacy models of the United States dealer ecosystem.

### **Executive Summary**

A central finding of the study tour is that the United States automotive retail sector remains one of the most mature and structured dealer environments globally. The franchised dealer model continues to dominate the market and is supported by strong institutional representation and robust state and federal franchise protections. Despite affordability pressures resulting from rising vehicle prices, the market has demonstrated resilience, with dealerships maintaining strong operational performance. Internal combustion engine vehicles remain the dominant powertrain, while hybrids are gaining traction as a transitional technology and full battery electric vehicle adoption has progressed more gradually than initially anticipated in several segments.

Insights from the NADA Show highlighted the rapid transformation of dealership operations toward more data-driven and technology-enabled models. Dealers are investing heavily in digital retailing tools, artificial intelligence applications, and operational technologies that improve customer engagement, automate routine tasks, and enhance decision-making. At the same time, fixed operations remain the financial backbone of many dealerships, with service departments playing a critical role in profitability and customer retention. Customer experience has also emerged as a defining competitive factor, with dealerships placing increasing emphasis on speed, transparency, and seamless digital engagement throughout the buying and ownership journey.



Dealer visits in Tysons Corner provided practical examples of how high-performing dealerships translate these strategic themes into operational practice. These dealerships demonstrated strong process discipline, performance monitoring, and financial oversight, supported by integrated technology systems and clearly defined management structures. Customer-centric design, efficient service scheduling, and structured inventory management processes were common features, reinforcing the importance of operational excellence in sustaining dealership performance.

Engagements with NADA USA leadership further highlighted the institutional capabilities that underpin the strength of the US dealer system. The association represents more than 16,000 franchised dealers across the United States and operates as a sophisticated advocacy, education, and research organisation. Its influence is driven by high membership penetration, specialised legal and regulatory expertise, and extensive data and benchmarking programmes that support both dealer performance and policy engagement. Advocacy efforts focus heavily on regulatory processes and federal agencies, recognising that many dealer-impacting policies emerge through rulemaking rather than legislative processes.

The overall conclusion of the study tour is that while the automotive retail sector is undergoing significant structural change - driven by electrification, new market entrants, evolving consumer expectations, and technological disruption - the fundamental value proposition of franchised dealerships remains strong. Dealers who combine disciplined operations, strong customer experience, and effective use of technology are likely to remain competitive and profitable. For NADA South Africa, the learnings from this engagement provide valuable guidance on strengthening advocacy capabilities, expanding industry research and data programmes, and supporting member dealers in adapting to the evolving global automotive landscape.

### **Full report**

The full report is available [here](#).

### **Final word**

While this report captures the essential learnings and strategic observations from the 2026 Study Tour, it is important to recognise that no document can fully replicate the lived experience of attending the NADA USA Conference. The true value of the event lies in the



immersive exposure to global innovation, the immediate exchange of strategic insights and the high-level networking opportunities that arise from being present among the world's leading automotive retail experts.

We strongly encourage all relevant executives to join NADA SA in attending future NADA USA conferences. Participating in these delegations is a vital professional investment and a unique opportunity to benchmark your operations against global best practices, ensuring that the South African dealer network remains resilient, competitive, and forward-thinking.

**ENDS**