Global Conversions: Holding the Flag High for Sri Lanka

Suresh Edirisinghe, Chairman and Managing Director of Global Conversions, is making Sri Lanka proud. The UAE-based Sri Lankan company he founded in 2022 is in the business of converting vehicles for the right-hand drive market. He and his team of Sri Lankan mechanics are celebrating the milestone of converting a Hummer EV SUV into a right-hand drive. It was the world's first. In two years, they have stamped their mark in converting American-manufactured high-powered SUVs and trucks from their UAE-based facility. The team driving this change is Sri Lankan. Their performance is receiving the spotlight for quality and timely delivery. Driving their journey to excellence, Suresh Edirisinghe has it in his veins. He is no stranger to the automotive industry, representing the third generation of a wholly Sri Lankan-owned company with a heritage of over seven decades. Speaking to Business Today about their latest accomplishment and business in the UAE, he explained that he had modeled Global Conversions on the values of his family-owned business; honesty and integrity are central while ensuring customer satisfaction is an ever-present tenet in the Edirisinghe business journey.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane



Suresh Edirisinghe, Chairman and Managing Director, Global Conversions.

What is Global Conversions? Tell us about your latest achievement and what makes it unique.

Global Conversions specializes in converting American SUVs, muscle, and sedans for the right-hand drive market. The company brings an excellent automobile servicing and engineering track record from Sri Lanka through Edirisinghe Brothers Private Limited, an entirely home-grown company synonymous with trust and quality. Setting up Global Conversions in the UAE in 2022 was a strategic decision. Given UAE’s rise to hub status, we have become a one-stop-shop operation.

Customers can buy and convert their vehicles under one roof. Logistically, it made sense because the vehicles we convert are available in the UAE, giving us access and ease of maneuvering while saving time and transportation costs. For instance, purchasing an American-manufactured vehicle in the UAE is cost-effective because it imports them freely. Compare this to a country like Sri Lanka, where importing such a brand of automobiles would be hassling on top of the enormous cost and the task of plotting through the numerous tax requirements. That would lead to a cost pile-up. The UAE has the right combination – easy access to vehicles and customers.

Taking up the conversion of a Hummer EV SUV was a challenge that we eagerly wanted to try with our team at Global Conversions. We must prove our commitment to innovation and excellence in vehicle conversions by taking on more brands, thereby communicating our ethos of rising to any challenge to undertake trailblazing projects and our expertise in executing the never-tried-before commissions. The credit for completing the first-ever conversion of a Hummer EV SUV to Right Hand Drive in twenty-seven days goes to the team of engineer/mechanics and the general manager. As directors and investors, we can only guide the process, but our team of men at Global Conversions executed the process with precision to record the world’s first conversion of a Hummer EV SUV.

This feat is particularly gratifying because it is the world’s first carried out by a team of Sri Lankans. Our philosophy at Global Conversions is to trust their skill and give them the freedom to do their job. And that’s what drives them to do their job with dedication. We refuse to cut corners regarding their welfare and wellbeing to stretch our margins. The quality of our output depends on their skills as much as the support and enabling environment the management creates for them. We have one of the best teams in vehicle conversion.

We are the first company to complete conversions in under one month. We strongly believe and are committed to providing customers with the best product they are paying for. And that’s precisely why we offer customers ten thousand dollars back if we fail to convert a vehicle within twenty-seven days of purchase. Our media campaign following the Hummer EV SUV conversion has elicited tremendous response, which is evident from the multiple nationalities of visitors our facility has drawn who are awed by our twenty-seven-day achievement. Since launching the

Hummer EV SUV, we have received over thirty-six orders in a week, mainly from India, with some from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia. Imagine the amount of work we can do through our UAE investment.

We convert the Chrysler, GMC, Cadillac, Ford, Lincoln, Dodge, Toyota, and Nissan. I am excited about our next project, which will convert the first-ever all-electric 2025 Cadillac Escalade IQ, the world's most expensive and powerful SUV. With emphasis on reducing carbon emissions, the way forward is electric, and hence, the first-ever Hummer SUV conversion was also an electric vehicle. We are leveraging this transition. We have quite a few new activities lined up. We are focusing on entering the Australian market with our expertise.

Apart from the twenty-seven-day delivery guarantee, what makes your business model attractive, given that they belong to a higher range in pricing?

People can save time and money. Generally, there is a waiting time for purchasing a vehicle. It may take a few months before the automobile reaches the buyer. If it is a left-hand drive, and the buyer wants it converted, it will demand more time before it finally reaches its destination. An individual's investment gets tied up in a lengthy process. Our proposition skips the various stages and offers a range of vehicles we can convert quickly for a right-hand drive market. Our offering is helping right-hand drive countries cut costs while allowing them to enjoy the luxury of driving American-manufactured automobiles.

US automobile makers like GM and Ford manufacture for the left-hand market, the predominant market globally. With just fifty-two countries in the right-hand drive market, it is unfeasible for them to manufacture for a small demand. US-manufactured cars are favored by a segment of people in the right-hand drive countries, given that they are some of the world's top brands, and that's where Global Conversions comes in handy. Our proposition reduces unnecessary costs and offers a converted vehicle.

We do business with individual customers and car dealers. Accessing our services is cost-effective for car dealers, who can decide their margins in their countries. We are happy to cater to a segment in right-hand drive markets who yearn for the luxury of some of the top automobile brands in the world, which is a ubiquitously

human trait of desiring what is not available. Our service allows this segment to use them in their countries where rules differ because we have already made the necessary changes to suit their practices.

How did this transition to the UAE come about?

I have been dealing with the UAE for the past twenty years and am closely acquainted with the Dubai Ruler's nephew, His Highness Sheikh Mana Ali Saeed Rashid Al Maktoum, through business. Since His Highness knew my family's involvement in the automotive industry and our business acumen of over seventy years, he encouraged me to harness those benefits and my engineering background to set up Global Conversions. Given how much the Emirati has to offer for investors, he was highly encouraging in driving this transition. I thought about his proposal. Two years ago, when this all began, His Highness's brother suggested that we employ a group of mechanics who had come to Dubai on another project and were stranded. And two years since we launched Global Conversions, I am amazed at how much we have achieved through these men. I am proud of them and of employing Sri Lankans on this phenomenal project. They are doing Sri Lanka proud with their skills and are a testament to our capabilities.

We operate from the Al Hamra Industrial Zone in Ras Al- Khaimah, an industrial hub offering efficient service for setting up business in a multinational community. We are delighted with the location; it is peaceful and provides all the facilities businesses require, including supporting their advent and setting up the process through hassle-free authorization and registration. They have created an enabling environment to attract diverse businesses by making efficient and customized solutions among their key pillars. Sri Lanka could harness similar opportunities if only they made it a more accessible, investor, and tax-friendly destination. However, Sri Lanka is on the right track under the stewardship of President Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose foresight and acumen are leading the country on the road to recovery and development. His continuity as President will benefit Sri Lanka's future and businesses.



As you praise your team at Global Conversions, what can you tell us about them?

The vital lesson for us as Sri Lankans is to appreciate the capabilities of Sri Lankans anywhere in the world. We are intelligent and talented; our mechanics testify to our potential. They delivered the world's first conversion of a Hummer EV SUV. We are dealing with vehicles manufactured with cutting-edge technology and robotics, but our robotics are the mechanics' bare hands that execute this colossal task. They are highly skilled men who have mastered the process and accomplished the latest conversion outstandingly. We have sixty-five employed at our UAE plant, which has an area of forty thousand square feet, where we convert nearly thirty-five automobiles a month.

Team wellbeing is a priority for us. We provide accommodation, transport, health

coverage, and food. Three chefs from Sri Lanka prepare Sri Lankan food for our men. What we do at Global Conversions is an extension of the values we embrace at our local business. My late father emphasized employee welfare and imbued that value in us, the importance of caring for our teams. Just like in Sri Lanka, we extend numerous benefits to the men employed at Global Conversions, compensating them three times more than they would receive in Sri Lanka.

The final product is a testament to our team's skill. Visitors can compare the difference between an original left-hand drive and a converted model to realize how seamlessly they have executed the change. Potential customers checking on the finished product praise the outcome because they cannot see a difference or the telltale signs of change. Our focus is not only to do the job correctly but also to do it to the best of our ability to ensure customer satisfaction.

We have been able to achieve many industry firsts as a result of leading a company with a leadership team comprising of my family members, including our CEO, Nivran Weerakoon and our Head of Special Projects, Andrew Wickramasinghe. Our leadership team is strengthened by our Director and General Manager, Ajith Rodrigo, who has over two decades of experience in vehicles' left to right-hand drive conversion and our Head of Operations, Sulith Fonseka.

We are on a constant learning curve, ready to learn the details of a new product or model and adopt global trends in technology and innovation. As the world transitions to the use of lightweight and durable plastics for efficiency and safety, our tasks will evolve to align with changing technology and innovation, which will help us deliver a product of global standard.

What can you tell us about the UAE investment?

Majority of the UAE investment was funded by me and I have two partners, Dunstan Rozairo and Adam Max, who owns AutoExport. AutoExport specializes in exporting vehicle from the UK to destinations worldwide.

Is Sri Lanka not a viable market for such a project?

Some Sri Lankans can afford to buy the vehicles we deal with, and I have sold some of these brands before. However, Sri Lanka is not known for importing the range of automobiles we convert. Moreover, given the current circumstances, importing them is a complex process. The country's regulations right now are too restrictive.

But you never know what will change, and as I have plans for Sri Lanka, I know the country's changing circumstances will catalyze investments in the future. The signs of economic recovery are positive, and everyone can witness the changes that are taking place. The UAE rulers are very pleased with Sri Lanka's leadership and their course towards economic recovery. Sri Lanka is on the road to a great future if we continue under the direction of the current President.

How has your family-owned business in Sri Lanka helped with your work in the UAE?

What makes Global Conversions special is the engineering background we have brought with us from Sri Lanka through Edirisinghe Brothers Private Limited. It is a company established by my grandfather Don Simon Edirisinghe in 1947. Over seventy-eight years, the business had passed from my grandfather to my father, Gamini, and Uncle Chandra. Today, members of the third generation have entered the business; my brother Suren, my cousin Sanka, and I are part of the leadership team. My father and uncle followed their father's values and work ethic, one of which was to clear assignments in a day. Their customer-centric approach meant that the customer should receive a hassle-free service. We have a team strength of two hundred at Auto Court, the company's first business for vehicle servicing and engine rebuilding. The Edirisinghe Brothers Hybrid Hub, which my cousin Sanka initiated, specializes in servicing, repairing, and high-voltage battery conditioning for hybrid and electric vehicles. Altogether, the Group employs close to four hundred people. We have achieved a base of two hundred thousand customers within eight years of opening the Hybrid Hub, which is a testament to our commitment to serve honestly.

My father, who passed away two years ago, continued the founder's values and infused them in us. Our elders advised us always to do the right thing for our customers. Doing the right thing meant not overcharging customers. My father told us to create happy customers who would come to us again. Notably, he told us to remember that behind our work are families whose safety is sacrosanct. Therefore, whatever I do today, I want to do it perfectly. I will ensure that every top brand we convert will maintain the same standards as the original. If it is a GM or Ford SUV or truck, I will ensure we retain those brands' reputations. After all, people and families ride those vehicles, and in delivering their desires, we must ensure that they get value for money, and safety and comfort are prerequisites of that quality. Sometimes, our conversion costs may be more than others, but it's unwise to compromise on price and quality. Our margins are lower than most of our

competitors. While we focus on speed and efficiency, adhering to our generational mantra, safety is our priority, and that is the legacy we bring from Edirisinghe Brothers Private Limited, a legacy of trust for delivering a safe product, a value that we want customers to associate with Global Conversions.

What are your plans now that you have successfully established in the UAE?

I have planned an enormous project for Sri Lanka, which I will reveal later in the year. It’s massive and will provide over one thousand two hundred employment opportunities in over a million square feet of space. The project aims entirely for the export market. And I hope we get the support back home, which I am confident about under His Excellency’s stewardship.

We are also focusing on expansion, and Australia is on our radar. Suppose you ask why Australia, Australia is a vast market. We will apply for the Australian Design Rules national vehicle safety standard, hoping to establish a fully-fledged workshop and service center in Melbourne or Brisbane. We have successfully obtained the ISO 9001:2015 standard applicable to the automotive industry.

We are a hundred percent Sri Lankan company operating successfully in the UAE, and we are in a leading position dominating the market in the UAE, a position I am confident we will retain at least for the next fifteen years until the next leadership is ready to take over. The secret to success is doing our best, not the second best, which we will pursue as we grow from strength to strength.