

REAL JDM

There is Nothing More Uncool than Understeer

WE LIKE TO HAVE FULL CONTROL OF OUR CAR; UNDERSTEER IS OUR ENEMY.

BY BEN SCHAEFFER (WWW.BULLETPROOFAUTOMOBILE.COM)



FOR YEARS the Japanese have been the catalyst for new trends that transcend the style and performance of our cars stateside. New trends are continually born at various Japanese automotive playgrounds. The JGTC, D1, Wangan, Touge and Gymkhana are classic examples of racing styles unique to Japan.

Over recent years one evolving trend that spans across nearly all genres of racing is the increasing width of front wheels. Regardless of whether a car is front, rear or all wheel drive, the majority of top tuners are increasing front wheel widths. This new style of tuning oftentimes completely nullifies the previously common staggering of tires on front engine rear drive (FR) cars. In many cases involv-

ing front engine front drive (FF) and 4WD cars, tuners actually use a reverse stagger in which the front wheels are wider than the rear wheels.

Car manufacturers inevitably will continue to build understeer biased cars to keep their cars accessible to all levels of driver and to reduce their liability. The manufacturers must assume that the drivers of their cars are relatively inexperienced and that in an oversteer slide they will be unable to handle the vehicle to avoid a spin. So rather than oversteer and spin, factory cars will typically tramline straight ahead when pushed past the limit, refusing to accept the inputs of the driver until traction is restored. While that approach is safe on the street, it is

dangerous on the track and it's not fast or fun at either venue.

True drivers could easily argue that there is nothing more uncool than understeer. Enthusiasts like us prefer to have full control of their car, to have the option of getting the tail out when we feel like it, and to keep the tail out as long as we feel like it. We like to have full control of our cars; understeer is our arch enemy.

Once considered abnormal, over recent years many FF layout cars in Japan have switched to wider front wheels as well. The wider fronts help by creating better turn in grip, reducing the notorious understeer that plagues FF cars. Signal Auto utilizes this tuning philosophy on the Signal EK9 Civic Turbo time attack car.

Using 8.5-inch front rims and 7-inch rear rims, the Signal EK9 remains at the top of the FF class running 1'01.4 lap times at Tsukuba.

The Lancer Evolution is no stranger to this evolving tuning philosophy, time attack cars such as Stillway's 58.1 second Tsukuba Evolution VII use 255 width front tires and 235 width rear tires. The LanEvo serves as an example that not only FF, but also 4WD cars often suffer from built in understeer, even despite the Evo's reputation for being able to drift easily.

Even the Honda S2000, which in the US is commonly tuned with 8" wide front rims and 9" wide rear rims is being equipped with 9" front and 9" rear rims by time attack experts such as Powerhouse Amuse, ASM and J's Racing. Front fenders by J's Racing make the task of installing wider front rims easy while also increasing aerodynamic efficiency.

Whether it's FF, FR or 4WD everyone who is serious about competition in Japan is focused on increasing grip at the front wheels. With all of the countless money invested into tuning JGTC cars, the fact that the JGTC Supras are using 13-inch wide front and rear tires should send a message to all of those that are looking to make their car the fastest it can be.

This new tuning philosophy has been an influential part in the development of new aero parts, specifically front wide fenders. Front wide fenders ranging from 15-50mm enable cars to fit wider rubber at the front wheels, and to have better wheel offsets for clearing big brake kits. VARIS, for example, offers a widely popular wide front fender kit for the Evolution VIII, allowing the use of 18x9.5x15-inch rims. These days it's rare to find a fast Evo in Japan not using front wide fenders.

As increasingly wide front wheels become more popular worldwide, it's to be expected that owners will choose styling cues to highlight their understeer liberated rides. An example of this is the shift of deep dish rim setups from the classic "shallow front/deep rear" to the more aggressive "deep front/deep rear". A deep front lip makes a statement that the owner is no stranger to oversteer and that they enjoy pushing their car to the limit. Whether looking at show cars like the BN Sports wide body JZ30 Soarer or time attack cars like Top Secret's V35 GT-R wide body, it's easy to convince even the skeptics that wider front rims are here to stay. They look amazing, they increase driving excitement and most importantly they decrease lap times. ■■■

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