

**BEN
SCHAFER**

Yashio Factory Interview

Pink Is In This Season

The Real JDM is a monthly column written by Ben Schaffer of Bespoke Ventures. Bespoke Ventures operates a number of JDM related businesses including: Bulletproof Automotive, Top Secret III, Ings+1 USA, VARIS USA, HyperRev USA and Bespoke VIP. Visit www.bespokeventures.com for more information.



OKA-CHAN

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Every month The Real JDM strives to bring you new knowledge about the Japanese tuning world. This month's offering is a special treat representing The Real JDM's first exclusive tuner interview. The limited number of interviews I'll be doing are focused on Japanese market innovators who are lesser known in North America and who are deserving of more recognition. This month I'm pleased to introduce you to Mr. Kazuyoshi Okamura, the founder and President of Yashio Factory and D1 Grand Prix driver.

Okamura-san, affectionately known by many of his fans as simply "Oka-chan" is a legend of Japanese tuning. He has worked extremely hard during his 15-year history of building his company, Yashio Factory, and as a result he has found celebrity status in Japan within the automotive tuning scene. Amongst his fans, Oka-chan's car tuning prowess is nearly as indistinguishable as his outrageous color scheme and Option video character he's built for himself. To appreciate the confidence in Oka-chan's tuning, it should be noted that he chose a very un-intimidating color of pink as his signature color of his demo cars. Surely, to be taken seriously, any race car painted pink must truly be a beast to earn respect. And respect has been earned over the years as Oka-chan pilots his own demo cars while setting outrageous time slips at racing circuits in Japan.

Oka-chan's competitors now fear the color pink, and that alone deserves our respect.

Yashio Factory amazingly has accomplished so many of their feats as a three-man shop, with Oka-chan carefully overseeing every new product's development and every bolt that's turned. Aside from building highly acclaimed cars for their customers, Yashio Factory has a successful business selling their own original products. Top sellers are their Super Radiator series and their original aero parts designed by Mr. Okamura himself. Fan favorites are also their t-shirts and stickers showing their lovable mascot, a cartoon Oka-chan inside a pink Alligator suit spitting fire, I've personally seen the image bring a smile to many.

Years ago, Yashio factory was best known by their marketing campaign "I Love Silvia." Although Oka-chan still clearly does love his Silvias, he has expanded well beyond his roots and branched out into many other vehicles ranging from the more expected 350Zs and GT-Rs to the less likely Toyota Vitz. Yashio Factory's Vitz demo car in particular has achieved a lot of press last year because of its unique high performance and fun driving characteristics contained within an unexpected package.

In January 2006 my Japanese office's Hiroki Naba and I conducted an interview with Mr. Okamura. We hope you enjoy Oka-chan's words, as translated into English:





Hiroki Naba: "What were you doing before you started Yashio Factory?"

Kazuyoshi Okamura: "I was doing similar things elsewhere before I started Yashio Factory about 15 years ago. We have since been focusing on the tuning of FR Silvias. I think we are the only shop which has such focus on Silvia tuning and I do not think anyone can do it better than we can."

HN: Why did you decide to focus on the Silvia?

KO: "I personally love the Silvia. Basically, the Silvia is not a sports car. Because of this, it runs faster and faster every time you modify it. Compared with other vehicles, the Silvia has the best rate of performance gain by modification. The performance of the Silvia almost never worsens due to the modifications, unlike some other performance vehicles like the GT-R for example."

HN: "What do you think of tuning industry?"

KO: "The tuning industry in Japan is over-saturated at the moment. That is why many companies go to the US, UK and etc. I feel

that the tuning has become stereotypical in the Japanese tuning industry. So now I have started working on the tuning of VQ engines of the Fairlady Z with 15 other companies since last year. We have been putting enthusiasm into the tuning of VQ engines. This is the one of the concepts and themes of us (Yashio and the other 15 unnamed companies) in the industry. We think that it is important to begin something new, otherwise people will not follow both the industry and those who are interested in the market.

I think the Z is the best car to tune from the current available car line up. I've heard that the Z is a popular car in the US as well. Fairlady Z's have such a strong engine and I had fun when I was driving it. If we spend a year tuning the Z, I think that engine can reach almost 400ps by dyno testing. I think many Americans will be interested in that level of power from a naturally aspirated VQ engine as well."

HN: "What is your plan for the future, during the next year and also the next five years?"

KO: "I have no plan. Basically I am the owner

of the tuning shop, tuner and also weekend racing driver who enjoys time attack and drifting. I wish to join some racing competitions in both grip and drifting in the US also. I may begin that starting next year."

HN: "What records are you most proud of?"

KO: "Without using a professional driver, I have set course records at Ebusu, Tsukuba and Maze circuits with my S15 Silvia that I tuned and drove. My personal best lap time at Tsukuba circuit is 57.7 seconds. Now I also have a license to join the D1 Grand Prix, so I will be competing there this year with my S15."

HN: "How do you see the North American market?"

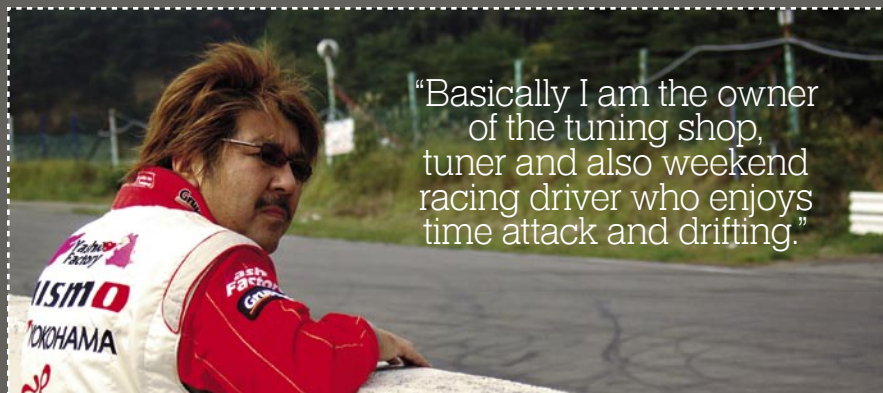
KO: "It is way too far from Japan so I am not interested in doing business there, but I am really interested in joining some races in the US."

HN: "Have you been to the US before and if so, which restaurants do you like best in the US?"

KO: "I have been to US and stayed in Torrance, California before. I have found many Japanese restaurants that are good, but I also discovered that I really like "In-N-Out Burger".

HN: "Lastly, I find your choice of color interesting. Could you please tell us about it?"

KO: "15 years ago I wanted to attract many people and make a name for myself. Nobody knew about me and my tuning skill wasn't enough to be recognized. So I decided to use a bright pink color on my car to get more people's attention. At that time, nobody was using this kind of pink. Our logo, which is an alligator is also original so that nobody would forget who we are." ■■■



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Pictured from left to right: LCDR Mark Simon, ETCM Eric Olis, BMC Dan Ames, BM1 Michael O'Connell, EN1 Jason Fetterman, EM2 Mark DiPietro, LT Lewis Baker, MM2 Sergio Rodriguez

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