



ATTACK OF THE PRIUS

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.

IT'S NO WONDER THAT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ARE TRADING IN THEIR GAS GUZZLING CARS FOR BLAND YET ECO-FRIENDLY HYBRIDS LIKE THE PRIUS.



You can't hear it, but they are all around you. They swarm through your neighborhood and they are multiplying at a rapid rate. This mutation was born out of environmental changes and although currently lifeless and without personality they are becoming the new bland standard of transportation. The Prius swarm is attacking.

Yesterday I looked in complete shock as gas prices in Los Angeles reached \$3.70 per gallon for 91 Octane. Of course we have it good, compared to Japan or England for example, who could only dream of gas as cheap as \$3.70 per gallon,

but for you and I, facing doubling gas prices is a tough reality to swallow. It is a not such a distant memory that I could get a full tank for under \$20, but we'll never see those days again ... at least not with the vehicles of these days. So it's no wonder that hundreds of thousands of people are trading in their gas guzzling cars for bland yet eco-friendly hybrids like the Prius.

The attack of the Prius is reaching a crescendo as I write this. A great barometer of American societal trends is the television show South Park and just a few weeks ago they dedicated an episode to simply rip on the Prius and their owners. As I laughed at South Park's traditionally and extravagantly overdone jab at their weekly topic,

the Prius, I felt that the Prius had hit a whole new level of automobile prime time. I went out the next day only to notice at least one additional Prius in my vision every 30 seconds as I was driving. They simply are everywhere in Southern California, and if they aren't everywhere yet in your town, they will be soon.

The question I've been asking myself is: with the current attack of the Prius, must all of these drivers be relegated to driving bland, flavorless vehicles that are sharp on etiquette but dull on attitude? Can the Prius be stylish as a car, not just as a social statement?

The Prius has many things going for it. It's one of the only cars that is priced under \$25,000,

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Kenstyle built a wild one-off widebody Prius, the first of its kind, and debuted at Tokyo Auto Salon in January of 2006.

yet has a strong ownership with multimillionaires. It defies typical conventions of style, class and desirability. It fits no definable demographics. Prius owners almost universally have traded their desire to drive for their desire to be socially responsible and of course to save big bucks at the pump.

Until there are more exciting Hybrid options that can offer more than 50MPG along with great style and performance, everyone is left with the current Hybrid choices and the Prius is the current poster boy for the Hybrid movement. On a quest to create personality and a coolness factor for a car that is devoid of such characteristics, I've researched and prepared a few ideas for you to ponder.

Visually the Prius doesn't excite the senses. The 15-inch rims won't impress the DUB crowd and the bubbly shape is far from aggressive. Rather than having road presence it seems to prefer to motor-on anonymously. Yet Kenstyle, a leading design and aero parts company in Japan, doesn't see it that way. They've found a way to create subtle aggression without throwing off the balance of the car. Their three-

piece aero kit infuses personality into the Prius without ruining the car, it does give it originality and exclusivity that has been missing.

Kenstyle also created another version of their aero kit (which is not for sale) much to the satisfaction of purists who feel that with this version Kenstyle went overboard. Debuted at Tokyo Auto Salon in January of 2006, Kenstyle built a wild one-off widebody Prius, the first of its kind. The car serves as a demonstration of Kenstyle's design, but the function of a widebody on the Prius is hard to defend because the last thing the Prius needs is giant rear wheels. Nonetheless, there were some stellar design cues executed on this wild show car, most notably being the integration of the rear blister fenders into the taillights with dramatic horizontal slats.

At an earlier Auto Salon, Japanese tuner Blitz introduced the first turbo Prius to the market. Although the turbo kit never made it to production, the demo model was said to add 60 more horsepower. While 60 horsepower isn't impressive to those of you with 400+hp sports cars, 60hp is more than enough to make the Prius fun to drive.

It should also be kept in mind how ideal a turbo is for a hybrid car. The Prius' electric engine produces 295 ft/lbs of torque from 0-1200 rpm, a huge number for a car weighing under 2900 lbs. What the Prius has in stop light throttle response it lacks in response while at speed. Naturally a turbo has the inverse of these characteristics, always having some degree of lag at low rpm while making up for it with high RPM boost. Combining the electric engine's torque with a turbo gas engine balances out the pack-

age and gives usable power at all RPM ranges. On paper the numbers might not be huge, but for driving performance it must be fun to drive a silent killer like the Blitz turbo Prius. As for its detriment to fuel economy, the publication AutoSpeed in Australia built their own homemade Prius turbo kit and gained two more MPG with their turbo installed!

Luckily well rounded Prius tuning is possible because of the support of two major Toyota tuning companies in Japan, TRD and Toms. TRD offers only a select few parts such as their Sportivo Coilover suspension, but Toms offers the full catalog. Some exciting parts from Toms Japan include: Exhaust system with 120mm oval tip, Front Tower Bar, Suspension Member Brace, Subframe Brace Set, and Front and Rear Lower Tie bars.

The Prius doesn't have the DNA to ever become a time attack car, this is certain. However what it does have, aside from the environmental statement, is a platform that exudes more status than the usual sub \$25k car. Its platform can be made sportier with more power and largely improved handling. Its interior is already well appointed with DVD Navi, Bluetooth, leather and most of the goodies found in luxury cars. So ultimately it could make for the basis of a nice, light tuned VIP ride. Filling those little fenders to capacity with some lower offset rims and stretched tires, a black on black Prius with the aforementioned mods could actually bridge the gap between environmentally friendly and "bad-ass" where the two have never collided before. This is all until the real eco friendly tarmac murderers get released into the wild. ■■■



Be prepared – Silicon Valley's about to bring you the Tesla Motors branded Lotus Elise based electric rocket as well as the Wrightspeed branded Ariel Atom based X1 which silently blasts 0-60 in 3.0 seconds.





Deejay (dē'-jā') n. 1. Person with access to a hot car and a stash of killer tunes, uniquely qualifying them to get the party jumping. <After he got XM Satellite Radio, he was the *deejay* and his car was the club.>

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