



Itasha Tokyo 2013

Kawaii!

Event | Everything is different in Japan. That even goes for the idea of beauty. In Europe tough cars are like an angry looking BMW, a self assured Audi or an intimidating Hummer are considered attractive. In Japan it is all about being cute. Cars ought to be cute and for those who want to take it one step further there's "Itasha". Autozine attended an Itasha event to find out all about it...

Up until around 2006 putting logos on cars was only done by companies. A lorry carried the name of its company and a sports car carried the name of its sponsors. In Akihabara, the electronics district of Tokyo, the owner of a Honda Civic had a different idea. He decorated his car with the image of his favourite cartoon character, or "manga" in proper Japanese.



His initiative was noticed, gained some followers and soon the "Itasha nori" (owners of decorated cars) met regularly on a parking lot in Akihabara to exchange ideas and show off their cars. In 2008 a magazine

called "Itasha Graphics" was founded and the first official event was organised. The very first event drew as many as 300 contestants.



Old school

One of the many side events during the Tokyo Motorshow 2013 is the eighth official Itasha event. Present today is one of the oldest and most loved cars: a Nissan Sylvia "Lovely" in blue, purple and black. This is one of the very first cars to be rigorously customised both on the outside and the inside.



Nowadays, stickers are simply printed using a specialised colour printer and are applied to the car as a whole. In the early days of Itasha this technique wasn't available. The white "Favorite" car shows how it was done in the early days. It is the result of cutting and pasting layer upon layer of stickers for three hours a day for three months on end. The owner drives this car to his office daily and proudly tells that he's being photographed on the road almost every day. Well deserved!



Another eye-catcher is the white Toyota Hi-Ace which has not been decorated using stickers, but has been painted using felt tip markers! This car is also a perfect example of Itasha, because it isn't about the car but about the customisation. Even better: vans and MPVs are highly popular because they simply offer more space for decorations.

Tuning cars isn't very popular among the contestants. Except for the obligatory set of flashy rims, at most only 40% of the vehicles have had their mechanics tampered with. Car audio isn't popular either; less than 30% of the cars carry subwoofers, amps or other high-tech gadgets.



No pimping please

An exception to the rule "it's not about the car but about the Itasha" is the Daihatsu Midget 2 owned by photographer "De le Metallica". This car is a replica of a model from 1957 and is now used by its owner as an advertisement on wheels.



During the previous Itasha meeting, first prize went to an almost inconspicuous car. The owner of a white MPV only customised the rear of his car! And how! The entire boot lid has been replaced by an actual

sculpture! This is definitive proof that Itasha isn't the same as pimping a car. While pimping is provoking the outside world by showing off poor taste, Itasha is a true art form.



Next to Hatsune almost all common manga characters are present here, as long as they are cute. Some contestants go as far as to hire the artist of their favourite manga to do custom work. Since this can be very expensive, the owner of such a one-off work of art has the text "I don't have any friends left" on his front bumper.

Manga

The most popular character amongst the competitors is "Hatsune Miku". Hatsune Miku is a so-called "vocaloid" or "singing synthesiser". The Japanese love female singers with a high-pitched voice. A computer can reach even higher notes and that's why this "singing computer" is a huge hit.

To give this virtual singer a face, the character of "Hatsune Miku" was developed. As long as it's not being used for commercial purposes, everyone is free to recreate and display Hatsune in every imaginable way.



A highly original car is the Abarth 500 with 3D stickers.

Do bring your own 3D glasses to fully enjoy the effect.

Most "Itasha nori" are men, but Saori Amu is the queen of Itasha. Together with her pink Suzuki Lapan (a version of the Alto aimed at women and developed solely for the Japanese market) she won numerous awards. Saori didn't choose a manga character, but instead opted for her favourite video game. The boot of the Suzuki has been "upholstered" with many displays, so she can play her beloved "Tohou Project" where ever she goes.



Main stream

The Itasha 2013 event was hosted by "Mega Web"; the largest Toyota showroom in the world. And with good reason: Toyota is the first carmaker to offer Itasha decoration as a factory option. The customer can choose from a number of designs, which will then be

applied by the dealer. The Toyota Aqua and GT86 are the first models to be available in Itasha trim. Only in Japan of course.



Conclusion

Japanese doesn't have to be difficult! During the eighth official "Itasha" event one word was sufficient to get by: "kawaii" (cute). In Japan cars shouldn't be tough but cute and girls shouldn't be sexy but cute. Itasha takes that idea one step further in every way imaginable. Stickers and every accessory known to man will turn "cute" into an art form.

During the 2013 Tokyo Motorshow Itasha fans gathered to show their creations to the general public. The visitors where very enthusiastic because again and again they reacted: "kawaii, kawaii". And that's exactly what the contestants were aiming for! ■

