



Special Import-Car Show

The grass is always greener on the other side

Carshow | Japan is a far and mysterious country. The language barrier, the strange culture and the huge distance make a Japanese car something special by default. But... that's how the Japanese think about Europe as well! Since the grass is always greener on the other side, a European car is very prestigious for a Japanese driver. That's why the "Special Import-Car Show" was organised in Tokyo from 30 May to 1 June. Autozine was there.

Once every two years the "Tokyo Big Sight" expo building is home to the "Tokyo Motor Show". Journalists from all over the world flock together in the Japanese capital to report about the latest car news. Information is made available in just about every known language to make the foreign guests feel at home.

The interest for this relatively small event is huge! That's because the organisation came up with a unique combination. In the main building, car tuners show their latest products. For the "do it yourself" fans amongst the visitors, suppliers of tools and garages present their new products. And from the garages the show seamlessly changes into a house show! The parking lot behind the building is used for an old-timer and supercar show.



The "Special Import-Car Show" is another ball game! This time real Japanese culture prevails and there's not a single letter of English to be seen anywhere. Admittance is 2,000 yen, but those who fill out a registration form have free access. That poses a true challenge, especially since there's not a cash register to be seen anywhere...



The people at the house show say they're surprised about the presence of cars. The companies that exhibit cars are puzzled about the houses. At first the organisation simply explains that this combination will draw a bigger crowd.



Only after insisting on a better answer, the real answer is given. It turns out that in Japan tuned muscle cars are about as expensive as a house!

European chic

And indeed, the prices are sky high! And most clients don't just want the average run of the mill supercar. "European chic" won't do, it has to be tuned in Japan.



"Often that's not a luxury, but rather a necessity", states the owner of Roberuta tuning. "Slopes in Japan can be so steep that most supercars won't be able to clear them. We offer a lifting system that temporarily increases ground clearance to cope with such inclines". On the stand this is demonstrated by a line-up of supercars that hop up and down all day like nervous puppies.



Another typical Japanese thing is "itasha": decorating cars with images of cute cartoon characters. Most of the time cheap cars are used for this, but during a live demonstration a Bentley is "wrapped" in front of the audience.

Most tuners are Japanese companies. That's because the Japanese are said to have different wishes than European customers. For example, details are more important and perfection is the norm rather than an ideal.



There's even a "yakuza" (Mafia) treatment on the menu. It isn't just popular with the actual jakuza, but also with the average man that wants some respect during his daily commute. According to the tuning company it is all about discretion, not about flashy looks.



"sekusi" ("sexy")! The fact that a Japanese supercar might be more reliable, safer or faster is completely irrelevant. Quite the opposite: the real fans say they prefer a mechanical beast without computers or electronic gadgets. For that reason the F40 is highly desirable. Thanks to the TV show "Miami Vice" from the 80s a (white) Testarossa is the most popular car.



Traditionally, Lamborghini is more extravagant than Ferrari and that certainly goes for this crowd. The Lamborghini drivers here seem to want to have the most politically incorrect car in all of Japan. Fluorescent pink paint, tiger prints, sheet gold, shark fins and huge exhausts seem to be the things to have. Seeing such beautiful cars being exhibited like this, brings tears to the eyes of the Autozine photographer!

Supercars

The cars outside tell a different story. The supercars that showed up for the "Special Import-Car Show" are everything but discrete! Even a Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren or Audi R8 V10 is too inconspicuous and has to be altered. As if they are shopping carts, the Ferrari's are lined up in long rows. And not a single one is a stock model.

When asked why the owners of a Ferrari didn't choose a Japanese supercar, their answer is always the same:



Old-timers

The adjacent old-timer show is also limited to non-Japanese cars. And the drivers of classic cars also say they don't want to be average. But there's another reason for choosing a European cars. When Japanese carmakers started out, they focussed on building small, economical cars. Those who wanted a classic sports car were almost forced to shop in Europe.



As usual with car lovers, they have the strangest reason to choose a particular car. For example, the owner of a Triumph TR3 states that it was his destiny to drive this car. During a vacation in the USA the car found him and he decided to take it with him to Japan.

Lotus is the most popular brand by far. When asked about the reason, the Esprit drivers answer: "Jamusu Bondu, underwater car", referring to the movie "The Spy Who Loved Me" from 1977.



The Lotus Europa owes its popularity to a Japanese comic. Around 1975 many Japanese boys admired "Sakito no ookami" ("the wolf of the race track") in his Lotus Europa. Now that those boys are all grown up, they buy their dream car.

When asked if the car actually drives like a dream they simply laugh. A stock Europa is so slow that many modern city cars will outperform it. And the Europa is said to be the most unreliable of all vehicles on the show. "But I can repair it myself, so I grow even close to my car every time it breaks down", says one of the owners with a big smirk on his face.



Conclusion

The grass is always greener on the other side. European drivers prefer Japanese cars because of their advanced technology and high reliability. The Japanese prefer European products for their good

looks and strong personality.

The Japanese do it right or don't do it at all. During the "Special Import-Car Show" this becomes very obvious in the form of extremely tuned cars or lovely restored old-timers. And when a local tuner performs his magic, every European car will feel right at home in Japan! ■

