

BEN SCHAFFER

PHOENIX'S POWER SPL INTERVIEW

THE SENSIBLE 1,000+HP TUNING SHOP

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.



Six months ago The Real JDM introduced its JDM exclusive tuner interview, spotlighting Oka-chan from Yashio Factory. As promised, this month we're back with another exclusive interview from another Japanese tuning shop worthy of our respect and recognition. Again with the assistance of Bulletproof Japan's office Manager, Hiroki Naba, I'm proud to present the interview of Mr. Kouji Yokoyama, Founder and President of Phoenix's Power SPL.

Phoenix's Power SPL, also known by many as Garage Fukui, is a legendary tuning shop in Japan. Known for building brutally fast racing cars and equally powerful street legal cars, Phoenix's Power has built a cult following in Japan over its 20 years in business. Popular original tuning parts like their Departure II Pro exhausts, aero kits, chassis stiffeners and engine internals are already well known in America when it comes to cars like the SW20 MR-2. However, many of Phoenix's Power's top feats are done on Japanese market cars within their street tuning division. They are one of the exclusive RH9 club members (9 seconds in the 1/4 mile on street tires), and their insanely powerful customer cars remain street legal to swarm the streets of Japan.

Hiroki Naba: What were your prior jobs before starting Phoenix's Power?

Kouji Yokoyama: I was a Sushi chef, I worked in the construction industry and I was an auctioneer at the central Fish wholesale market of Japan. My father owned a business in the fish market so I was working there, thinking that I would never escape that job. However, my hobby was to ride motorcycles and later I became interested in cars as well. After gaining my driver's license, I started tuning cars with my friends. Around that time the trend was shifting from NA tuning to turbo tuning. When I first drove a turbo tuned vehicle, I became crazed by turbo tuning and I knew I must continue with it. After a while, the tuning shop where I purchased my parts from went bankrupt. I thought to myself, "oh I should start a tuning shop by myself!" That was how I started my business. I didn't know much about tuning so I had to study intensely by myself in a small cabin. Because of this, I don't have anyone to consider my teacher or my master.

What makes Phoenix's Power unique from other tuning shops is that usually a tuning shop produces parts from their perspective, but we look at things from the customer's perspective since I was a customer for such a long time.

The experiences I've learnt throughout my time as a customer really helped my business grow, since many tuning fans really liked my shop's concept of customer perspective. The shop is located deep in the country side, yet many people from all over Japan come to us nowadays. Perhaps they also come because we are a long time expert at computer tuning and we even accept customers who bring us cars poorly tuned by other shops for us to repair the computer tuning. We can handle very difficult computer tuning problems because of our experience.

HN: When did you start Phoenix's Power?

KY: I started Phoenix's Power in 1986 out of Fukui, Japan which is still where we are located. At that time, the name of our shop was Garage Fukui. Five years ago we changed the name to Phoenix's Power SPL.



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HN: Why did you choose the name Phoenix's Power SPL?

KY: I know there are many meanings for "phoenix". But my "phoenix" meaning comes from the bird which never died in Egyptian myths. Fukui-Ken where we live and have our shop has suffered from many natural disasters like floods and earthquakes as well as significant bombing by America during WWII, yet Fukui has made a revival every time. Thus phoenix has become a symbol of Fukui and we can easily find the name of phoenix in our city in public places such as "Phoenix-Street", "Phoenix Plaza" and so on.

HN: What is Phoenix's Power's specialty?

KY: The number one priority for me with my business is not technique, but our integrity, honesty and good faith. I think you can also relate to this in America. Of course the customers expect great technique, but sadly it is common that many shops don't maintain good morals and a good relationship with their customers. For example, if we make a mistake we admit it and fix it right away. That is the most important thing to me. This must not be a common answer to your question about our specialty, but I feel strongly that it is our greatest strength, even more than our tuning ability. Quite some time ago, I gave a video interview to a US company and I recognized that the US tuning industry is growing. It is my concern that as it grows, the chance of trouble also increases if tuning shops do not maintain good morals and focus of customer satisfaction. I want you to know that I feel this should be a priority with all tuning shops to ensure their success and the industry's success.

HN: In the technical aspect of your business, what is your specialty?

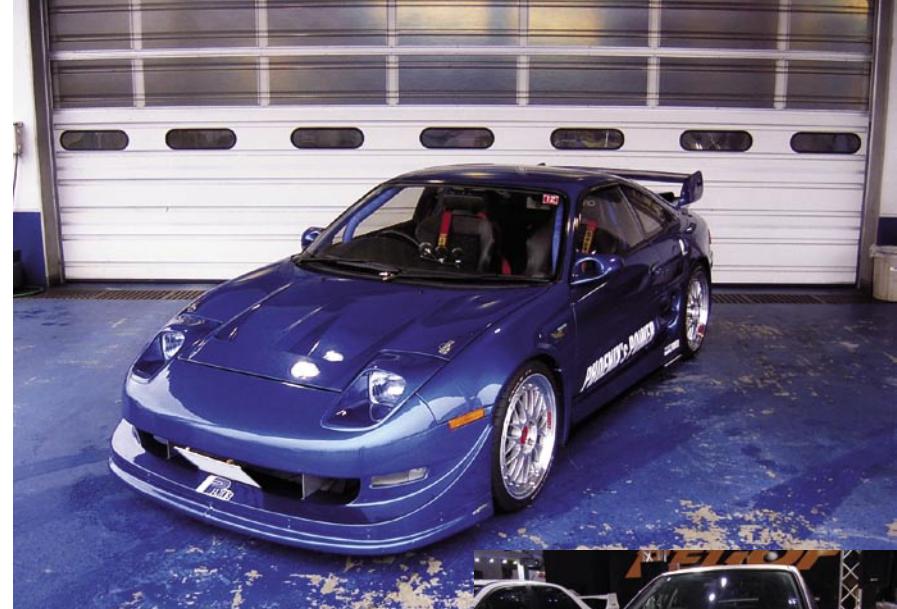
KY: Perhaps our biggest strength is our tuning of stock computers and our tuning of A'PEXi Power FC and HKS F-CON V Pro. That and our high power tuning programs are our specialty. Many customers want more power but don't want illegal tuning because illegal tuning doesn't look good in society. Because of this, we specialize in legal high power tuning which works excellent both on the street and the circuit.

HN: What is your favorite vehicle to tune?

KY: I like any Japanese vehicles, they are excellent and simple to tune. For example, if there are many beautiful girls around, I will want them all! It is exactly the same with cars, I can't choose just one!

HN: The Japanese tuning market's growth is slowing a little recently. How do you feel about it?

KY: It is very weird thing to say from my position, but I feel the Japanese tuning industry is at great



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risk. The concept of tuning is totally in conflict with Japanese society. The nature of a tuned car generally means that they become louder, their exhausts increase air pollution and speeding disturbs others on the street. The tuning industry should have realized that what we are doing is not good for society and they should have fixed it long ago. For example, something like a gentleman's agreement or voluntary decision to not sell exhausts which are too loud or too damaging to emissions for street use. If this was done long before, I'm confident we would have a much brighter future and impression within our society. This is why I hope the US tuning market, including manufacturers, tuners and magazine editors realize what has been happening in the Japanese tuning market. The US tuning market might make the same mistakes we in Japan have, unless they realize and work on the situation. For example, I understand that America is very strict with smog checks. If the industry is not careful with this, the US government can easily prohibit those tuning parts and the industry can be easily damaged.

HN: On a lighter note, what are your favorite records and awards?

KY: I always like to mark maximum speed records. A while ago, the best car I could build would reach 320 km/h (192 MPH). However in recent years I've made a lot of GT-Rs and Supras which easily exceed 320km/h. Also five or six years ago, I tuned a S14 Silvia and a SW20 MR-2 for 0-400m (1/4 Mile). At that time, both cars shattered all of Japan's records for drag racing. ■■■

Final words from Ben

Phoenix's Power SPL over the years has refined their philosophy and has become a leader in street legal tuning. They are a needed beacon of hope that the tuning industry and its customers can co-exist in harmony with the environment, society and law. It is important to recognize that Phoenix's Power has evolved over the years from an earlier focus of setting records to their current focus of uncompromised ethics and longevity for the entire industry. Although they no longer build cars for the sole purpose of setting records, rest assured that they haven't softened and they continue to improve their abilities. It is admirable that they can, with a clean conscience, create and drive the 1,000+ HP cars they create on public roads legally. As we near 2007, both Yokoyama-san and I hope that everyone's goals are better aligned. Wouldn't you prefer to see police give our massively tuned street legal cars the thumbs up in respect, rather than be ducking and dodging the law at every corner?



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N1 DAMPER

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