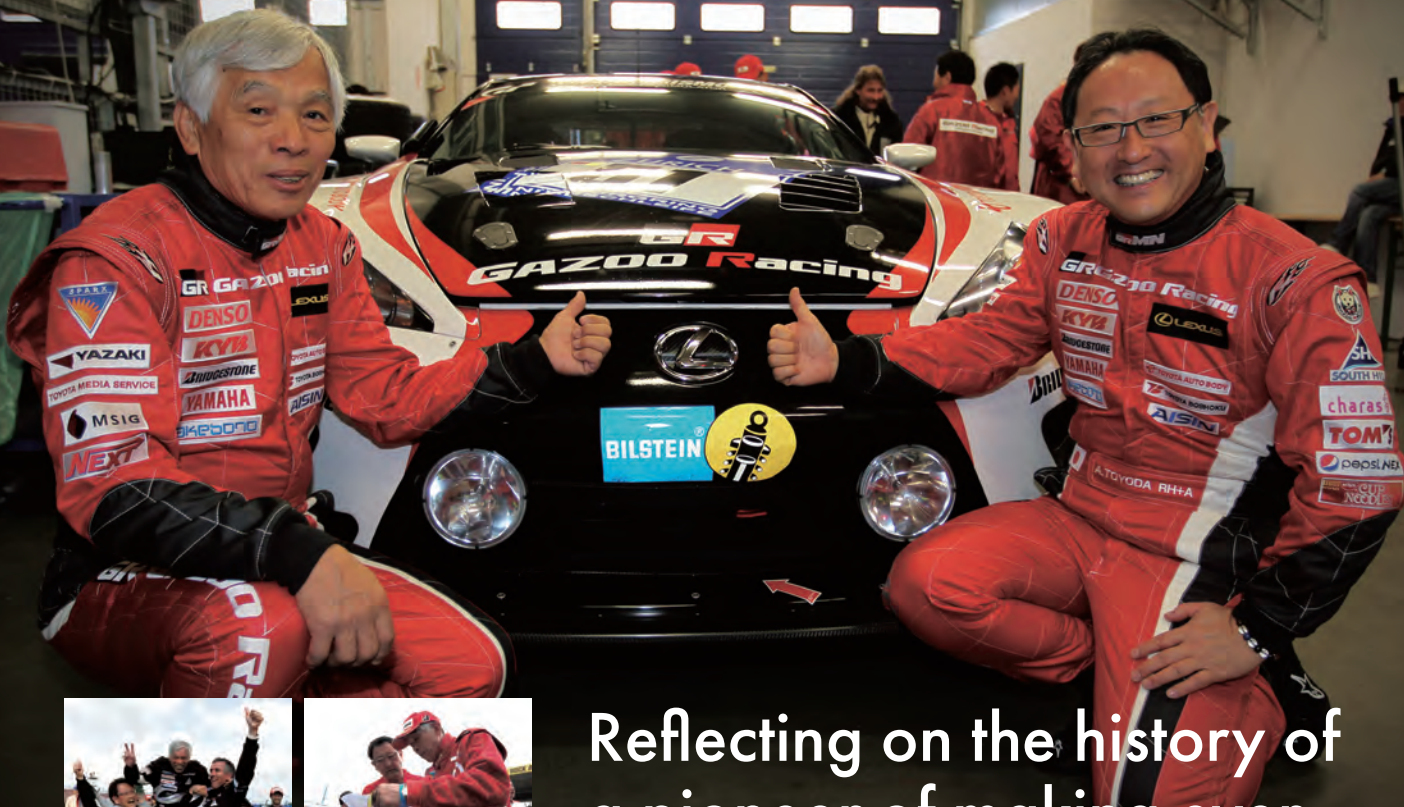


THE GAZOO RACING STORY

FOR MORIZO, IT ALL BEGAN WITH THE NÜRBURGRING





Reflecting on the history of a pioneer of making ever-better cars



Whenever Akio drove in the Nürburgring, Hiromu Naruse was always at his side, looking at him with a serious but gentle expression, almost like a father.

The message master driver **Hiromu Naruse** wanted to share with Akio Toyoda

When Akio Toyoda speaks, the discussion often turns to Hiromu Naruse. Naruse was the cream of the crop of Toyota's roughly 300 test drivers and Akio's own driving trainer.

On June 23, 2010, he passed away in a traffic accident on the outskirts of the Nürburgring. Although 14 years have passed since then, when Akio reflects on Naruse, it becomes clear why Akio has dedicated himself so

thoroughly to making ever-better cars.

Naruse joined the Toyota Motor Company (now the Toyota Motor Corporation) in 1963. His beginnings in the company were unusual: he was hired as a temporary worker in the Vehicle Inspection Division. However, vehicles had been a part of his life since he was a young boy, and he distinguished himself with startling speed. He became a member of

Engineering Division No. 7, which was responsible for developing motorsports vehicles and racing, and rose to the position of chief mechanic of the Toyota 7 racecar.

In 1973, just before Toyota ceased its racing activities, he visited Europe to provide technical guidance for a 6 hour endurance race by the Celica 1600GT, led by a Swiss Toyota dealer. This was his first encounter with the Nürburgring, which he'd spend the rest of life racing. It is where he came to intuitively feel that "roads make cars."

In the 1980s, starting with the first generation MR2, Toyota's sports models were developed at the Nürburgring.

"Japanese circuits, which have well-maintained road surfaces, only reveal one-tenth of a car's performance, but the Nürburgring uncovers 100 percent of a car's capabilities," he said. "For this reason, misrepresentation is impossible. Cars that are refined at the



Memories of driving training at the Nürburgring. Next to the Supra are the brand new (for the time) Porsche 911 Turbo and the BMW M5. The Supra, on the other hand, is unfortunately a used car...

Nürburgring are truly powerful cars. It's no surprise that the Supra still offers such high performance. That's why we're struggling to make a car that can surpass the Supra."

The Supra continues to be used within Toyota as a driver training car. Among Japanese drivers, Naruse had one of the top number of years of experience driving in the Nürburgring and one of the top number of laps completed. His abilities were even recognized by overseas manufacturers, and it was rumored that he received an offer from Toyota's rally team to drive for them.

He was involved in some form or another in the development of mass-production sports car models such as the Supra, but what's more, testing of the Lexus LFA was also left entirely to Naruse. Other vehicles he was in charge of testing included the first generation Celsior and the second generation Prius. Naruse explained, "To me, racecars and trucks were all the same thing—vehicles—and it all came down to materials. My job was just to make 100% use of those materials."

In those days, Toyota's strategy was centered less on making good cars and more on making cars that sold well and were easy to manufacture. Achieving Naruse's ideals was difficult. The driving feel achieved in prototypes could not be replicated in mass-production vehicles. He judged Toyota's own vehicles without mincing words, and is even said to have told members of the automobile media that he was close to, "They won't listen to me, so you say it. They might listen to an outside voice."

Thanks to the skills he developed through his work in the field, he came to be known as the "Top Gun" of the test drivers. Furthermore, because of his direct experience in the field in places like the Nürburgring, he believed that both Toyota's people and its cars had to be further refined if Toyota was to become a world-class manufacturer, and he took the lead in developing human resources.

These efforts were not limited to Toyota personnel, but also members of affiliated companies and of the

automobile media. He also said the words that led to Akio's own driving training.

"Somebody in your position, who doesn't know the first thing about driving, shouldn't make passing comments about cars. The least you can do is learn how to drive." "You should recognize that, as test drivers, we're putting our lives on the line to make better cars."

People tend to focus on this part alone, but he didn't stop there.

"If you feel like it, even if just once a month, I'll teach you how to drive." It epitomized Naruse: he may not have been the most eloquent speaker, but he took great care of people.

When asked about this comment, Naruse said, "Akio was just as dedicated to manufacturing as Eiji (Eiji Toyoda, Toyota Motor Company's fifth president) and Shoichiro (Shoichiro Toyoda, Toyota Motor Sales' fourth president and Toyota Motor Corporation's first president). He didn't just think "We're making money, so we're fine, Ebut instead recognized



The Lexus LFA development vehicle, whose testing was left completely up to Naruse (at the time, this model was known as the LF-A). "Finally, a Toyota car that could complete the Nürburgring."

the risks involved, with a mentality of "We can't sell a car like this. El think Akio has a strong desire to drive cars and get a good feel for them as a manufacturer."

Thinking back on it, Akio recalls that, surprisingly, it didn't bother him. The comments led to Akio taking on Naruse as his driving trainer, and through the driving training, Naruse shared his experience and expertise, without holding back.

According to Naruse, "Races are the ultimate stage for passing on techniques and developing human resources. Car-making is not debated using words and data; instead, discussions must center on actual vehicles that can be touched and seen firsthand." He added, "To create good cars, you need to develop good people."



Hiromu Naruse

Naruse joined the Toyota Motor Co., Ltd. in 1963. Initially, he was hired as a temporary worker in the Vehicle Inspection Division. He later worked in the field as a test driver, becoming a Master Driver, the top rank of Toyota's over 300 test drivers. He was one of the top Japanese drivers in terms of both years and laps at the Nürburgring. His refusal to compromise his ideals and his warm and honest character earned him many fans both inside and outside the company. On June 23, 2010, he died in an automobile accident during vehicle testing on the outskirts of the Nürburgring.

The Ultimate Human Resource Development Site



Nürburg Castle

Nürburgring Is the **Most Direct Route** to Making Ever-Better Cars

Nürburgring is located in Western Germany. Nordschleife (the north course), which is sometimes called the “old course,” is a massive circuit. While formally a circuit, its layout resembles typical regional European roads. One loop is roughly 20.8 km long, has a maximum elevation difference of 300 m, and features more than 170 corners of varying lengths. It is an extremely diverse course, with some sections requiring low speeds and others extremely high speeds. Furthermore, the surface of the course is almost entirely uneven, there is reduced traction due to dust, the course is narrow, and escape zones are rare. For these reasons, it is famed as one of the world’s hardest courses.

Toyota first visited the Nürburgring more than 40 years ago. Hiromu Naruse was 28 years old at the time, and visiting Europe to provide technical guidance, participating in the 6 Hours of Nürburgring in a Celica 1600GT.

Recounting that experience, he said “When I first drove at the Nürburgring, I instinctively felt both that I had come to an incredible place and that we could use this place for development. However, no one at Toyota recognized the importance of Nürburgring.”

The first Toyota model to be evaluated at the Nürburgring was the first generation MR2, but full-fledged development only began with the fourth generation Supra (A80).

Naruse had for a long time insisted: “Races are the ultimate stage on which

to pass on technologies and develop human resources.” The 24 Hours of Nürburgring, one of the hardest races in the world, was chosen as the stage on which to do this. The drivers were, of course, Toyota drivers, but the mechanics were also Toyota employees. It wasn’t a race by a professional racing team, but by company employees. It was the ultimate stage for human resource development—not simply a place to demonstrate driving techniques but to take direct control of the vehicle and feel its driving first-hand, to adjust it oneself, and to learn how to improve it. It was, as Naruse put it, a place for “developing people who understood the vehicles themselves.”

That said, this was not an official Toyota project, but more like a Toyota enthusiast activity. The vehicles used in the race were two old Altezzas, and most of the mechanics were Toyota employees. The team, virtual amateurs, although battered and bruised by first 24-hour Nürburgring, managed to complete the race. Looking back, the members involved said “It was a miracle that we finished the race.”

But their efforts gradually gained greater recognition, and they began to draw in new supporters. With each year of participation in the race, the team’s scale grew, until in 2015, eight years after their first race, the team was elevated to the position of an official Toyota team: TOYOTA GAZOO Racing. In 2016, the TGR Factory

was established through Toyota’s in-house company system, and in 2017 it evolved into the GR Company. The team entered pre-launch prototypes of the LFA, 86, and GR Supra, and featured advanced development technologies destined for future production vehicles.

Akio reflects on this era.

“In 2007, we could not even use the Toyota name; our makeshift team, consisting of Naruse and myself, had fewer members than most privateer teams. Back then, I was overcome by various frustrations—the frustration of not receiving any support; the frustration of not being taken seriously no matter what we did; the frustration of being belittled no matter what we did; and the frustration of having to run a Supra model that was no longer in production. All these frustrations remain with me, even now. These frustrations are why, as president, I keep urging us to “make ever-better cars. If we hadn’t taken that little step, the Toyota of today, as we know it, would not exist.”





Fuchsröhre

This ultra-high-speed S-shaped corner zigzags quickly while rapidly descending. Drivers are subject not only to lateral Gs but also vertical Gs.



Karussell

This is Nürburgring's more famous corner, steeply banked and paved with concrete on the inner side. Originally, the concrete slabs were installed for drainage.



Brunnchen

This corner, highly popular with spectators, allows people to watch the race from front, back, left, and right. It's also a fixture for photographers looking for scoops.



Pflanzgarten

This, along with Flugplatz, is one of the course's most famous jumps. Drivers navigate the corner by braking, releasing (jumping), and braking again.



Flugplatz

The name of this ultra-fast corner, Flugplatz, means "airfield" in German. Cars gain so much speed that when they reach the top of the slope, they momentarily take off.



Hocheichen – Quiddelbacher Höhe

This section has a series of winding curves. Driving while deftly straddling the curb may look easy, but in reality it presents quite the challenge.



Sabine-Schmitz-Kurve

In the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, this corner connects the GP course to the North Loop. It is the first corner drivers encounter after entering the North Loop.



Döttinger Höhe

This ultra-fast straight extends roughly two kilometers. It is even longer than the Fuji International Speedway, and Nürburg Castle is visible at right while racing.

Sometimes Beaming with a Smile Sometimes Baring Its Fangs



Looking Back on Toyota's **History of Tackling** the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, Starting with Its First Race in 2007

Akio Toyoda and Hiromu Naruse came from different backgrounds, occupied different positions, and came from different generations, but they shared an unswerving desire—a desire to put Toyota, which in its quest for sales volume had gone from focusing on making “good cars” to making “cars that sold well,” back on the right path.

To do so, they wanted to take Toyota back to its starting point, refining people and cars through motorsports, thereby contributing to the making of ever-better cars. The stage they chose for that was the 24 Hours of Nürburgring endurance race.

In the over a decade since Toyota first took part in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring in 2007, the machines it used in the race underwent major changes. The first time it competed in the race, Toyota's team drove Altezzas. Production of those models was discontinued in 2005, so the team bought used vehicles and modified them

for the race.

The team wasn't allowed to use the Toyota name, either. It was more of an enthusiast team effort than anything official. Every aspect of the race was a new experience.

Looking back at the race, Akio Toyoda (a.k.a. “Morizo E said, “Toyota trained for the 24 Hours of Nürburgring with used vehicles and took on the actual race with used vehicles. The other automakers in the race, on the other hand, were competing with new machines that wouldn't even be released for another two or three years. Naruse and I didn't want for Toyota to just make cars that would be passed by, but cars that would pass others by. That's the kind of car we wanted to drive in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring.”

On the right is a detailed, year-by-year recounting of that history. Nürburgring was a source of dramatic developments and challenges for the team, sometimes beaming with a

benevolent smile, sometimes baring its fangs.

One thing that has remained constant throughout this history is Toyota's reason for taking part in the race. This 24 hour event, which is said to be the world's most demanding race, serves as a space that Toyota can use to develop ever-better cars and enables it to refine its cars, people, and teams.

The short span of this race provides a wealth of experiences, including failures, and allows those involved to make discoveries that can't be arrived at through number-crunching or theoretical work alone. These discoveries, in turn, contribute to improvements. In other words, motorsports are the place for the development of Toyota's people.

The most important thing in all of these activities is not the goal but the starting line: “making ever-better cars.” That is why Toyota will continue in this endeavor.



The frustration of having to run a Supra model that was no longer in production

The fourth-generation Supra, which was launched in 1993, was developed using Nürburgring. Even after production was discontinued in 2002, it continued to see heavy use as a training car within Toyota due to its exceptional features. Even now, although its numbers have dwindled, it is still in use. Chairman Akio Toyoda is one of the people who learned the ropes with the Supra, but even then, he was frustrated that Toyota had no model that it could release as a replacement for the Supra. Naruse, understanding this feeling, made a suggestion to Akio: “Why not race in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring?” Thus began three years of grueling training.

Before

2007 The journey of automotive seasoning begins

The first time the team took on the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, it was not as an official Toyota project, but as a source of content for the GAZOO.com internet site. The goal was to convey the appeal and fun of cars. Instead of relying on an existing racing team, everything was done by members of Toyota. The team was led by a young Morizo and technical members, including master test driver Hiromu Naruse. Used Altezza RS200s were fitted out as racecars and, through the extreme conditions of the race, the team took their first small step, learning about how to engage in dialog with their cars.



2008 Start of participation in the race with an eye toward development

In the first year, the primary goal was for Toyota to field a team all on its own, but in the second year, the objective was the exploration of automotive seasoning. A great deal of attention was focused on taking part in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring to develop the LF-A, but GAZOO Racing, led by a desire to explore what it means to be a good car, performed parts replacement and setup on production vehicles (the UK six-speed manual transmission Lexus IS250) and took part in the fourth round of the Nürburgring endurance series (VLN4). This was the year in which vehicle development through the race, including the development of the LF-A, began in earnest.



2009 Leveraging the previous year's experience, the team takes part with two vehicles

The GAZOO Racing activities and the LF-A development testing, which had been performed separately in the previous year, were linked in 2009, further ramping up vehicle development through racing. The matte black and white LF-A was improved based on the findings of 2008. This two vehicle approach enabled the team to collect even more information, and test drivers such as Morizo and Hiromu Naruse also took part. Each vehicle encountered problems, and one had to drop out of the race, but the other made it through the whole 24 hour period, providing findings and data which could be applied to mass production.



2010 First class win and engine replacement

The LFA, which had undergone two years of development testing through the 24 Hours in Nürburgring, was officially released in the fall of 2009. In 2010, the team took part again, aiming to reach even greater heights. The two LFA cars were modified mass-production vehicles, but they achieved speeds that kept them shoulder-to-shoulder with full-fledged racecars in the qualifying race. In the final race, one of the cars, despite encountering some minor problems, kept up a steady pace and led GAZOO Racing to its first class win. The other suffered engine problems that would normally cause a car to drop out of the race, but the team replaced the engine and put it back in. This experience helped further refine the members of the team.





Car receives the “Blue Flash” designation for fast vehicles

2011

Although the team’s stance toward the 24 Hours of Nürburgring remained the same, which was to focus on development testing—tempering man and machines—instead of focusing on winning or losing, from this year the team set its sights higher. It entered two LFAs, and this year, it was dedicated to speed. Both vehicles were among the top placers in the qualifying race, winning, for the first time ever, the “Blue Flash” identifying lights granted to only the fastest cars in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring. However, the finals did not go as well as the qualifying race, and both cars experienced severe problems. Nonetheless, the mechanics did their utmost and were able to return the cars to the course, where they were able to complete the race.



Start of racing with both the LFA and the 86

2012

Due to the conviction that sports cars need to have their mettle tested at Nürburgring, the development testing under extreme conditions that had been carried out with the LFA were carried on with the 86 rear-wheel drive sports car. In 2012, the team raced with three vehicles: one LFA and two 86s. The LFA’s weight was reduced and its aerodynamics were revised to give it better ride quality. The 86 was competing in the race for the first time, so its modifications from the production vehicle specifications were kept minimal and the two vehicles were set up separately to gather various data and findings that could be reflected in mass-production vehicle development. Both the LFA and the 86 performed admirably, taking class wins.



Poor weather and issues that go beyond speed

2013

In 2013, the team again raced with one LFA and two 86s. The LFA secured a class win in the previous year’s race, so this year it aimed for performance equivalent to a G3 machine. The 86 also had its weight reduced and its engine refined in the pursuit of greater speed. However, one of the 86s crashed during the qualifying race. The damage to its front was severe and irreparable, so it dropped out of the race. Due to heavy rain and fog, other team’s vehicles also experienced numerous crashes, and the race was called off after roughly nine hours. Although the speediness of the vehicles was confirmed, the peakiness of the handling was an issue, highlighting the importance of balance in making ever-better cars.



GAZOO Racing takes three class wins for the first time ever

2014

The newly developed experimental vehicle, the LFA Code X, was added to the team, while keeping the three vehicle team composition. It was positioned in the same way as the LF-A had been in 2008 and 2009, refining a vehicle that had yet to be launched. The LFA and 86 were updated to provide a high level of balance between speed and ride quality. As a result of these efforts, there were no problems in either the qualifying races or the finals, and the driving of the LFA Code X made it hard to believe that it was the car’s first year in the race. For the first time ever, GAZOO Racing took class wins in every class it competed in. This 86 racing car served as the base for the launch of the 86 GRMN, a limited exclusive.

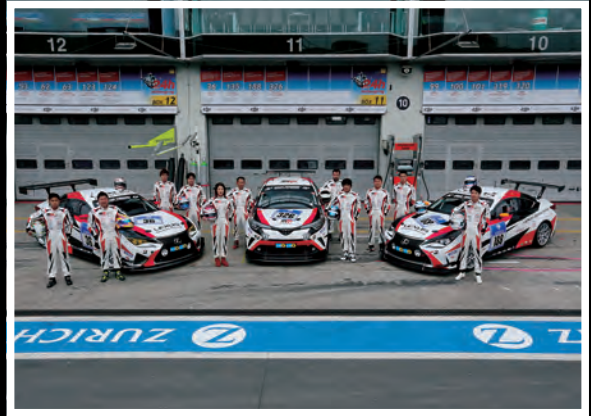
2015 The team goes back to its starting point, developing the new cars of the future

The LFA and 86 era of racing ended, and this year the team fielded the LFA Code X, which competed for the first time the preceding year, and two Lexus RCs. Using the experience from the previous year, the inside of the LFA Code X was completely overhauled. The Lexus RC had a new powertrain that was not available in production vehicles at the time. Both were positioned as cars being developed for the future, so it was a year of going back to GAZOO Racing's starting point of making ever-better cars. The LFA CodeX won in its class for the second consecutive year. The RCs ran with almost no problems, despite it being their first years in the race.



2016 The team celebrates a decade of participation, racing under the Toyota name

After a year of participation in the race, the entire team raced under the Toyota name for the first time. The Lexus RC, now in its second year in the race, was evolving steadily, and the addition of the Toyota C-HR, a crossover SUV, generated a lot of buzz. The RC F developed in collaboration with TOM'S, a new initiative for GAZOO, was designed for speed. Each of the three vehicles had its own mission. The RC F and C-HR completed the 24 hour race without any major issues, but the RC experienced major problems late at night, and although the team swapped out the transmission, it ultimately dropped out of the race. This year everyone became keenly aware yet again of what a harsh race Nürburgring is.



2017 Driving for 24 hours straight, without stopping once

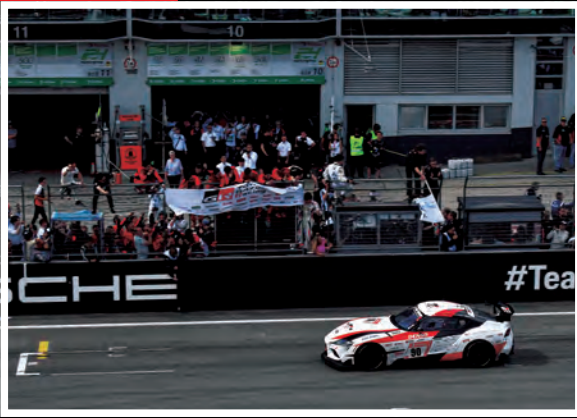
In the past few years, the team had competed with multiple vehicles, but in 2017 it focused on a single Lexus RC. Using the frustration from last year's failure to complete the race as motivation, the team carried out an overhaul so thorough it was almost a complete redesign. It was a neck-and-neck battle with the Subaru WRX STI, the Audi TT RS, and the Hyundai N, other vehicles in the same class. Other than a brush against another car during the night, there were no major problems. In fact, things went so steadily people were saying that it was almost scary. The car drove 24 hours without stopping, except for pit stops, and took 2nd in its class. Last year's tears of frustration turned into tears of joy in 2017.



2018 Testing next-generation technologies at Nürburgring

The Lexus RC, which had raced in Nürburgring since 2015, ended its run, replaced by the newcomer Lexus LC. While the RC visually resembles the mass-production LC, under the hood it incorporates a number of next-generation technologies that are intended to be used in future production cars. During the qualifying races, it was almost as fast as the SP9 class FIA-GT3 machine, which was aiming for an overall victory, but in the finals it experienced numerous problems, starting with brake problems during the early stages of the race and followed by transmission problems and engine problems. Nürburgring presents new machines with a host of challenges. Although the team suffered a defeat, the race provided it with a range of new experiences and findings.





The resurrection of the Supra and tears of frustration poured for the LC

2019

Reflecting on the lessons learned the previous year, the team completely overhauled the Lexus LC. It was almost a complete redesign. The GR Supra was also brought back for the first time in 17 years. Although the GR Supra had several small issues, it completed the 24 hour race and took 3rd in its class. The LC, on the other hand, struggled with frustrating and unexpected problems, despite being fully prepared to take on the race, having undergone 7,000 km of test driving in Japan and in Nürburgring in preparation. Morizo, who was driving the GR Supra on the second day of the finals, the anniversary of the death of top gun Hiromu Naruse, recalls feeling at the time of Naruse's death that he was there with him, driving.



The team continues to race at Nürburgring

2020

In preparation for 2020, the Lexus LC was updated with numerous new technologies that would be used in future sports cars and other commercial vehicles. Although the shakedown in Japan went well, the race was called off due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 race was also cancelled because of the pandemic. In 2022, the race's dates overlapped with a race in Japan, so the team could not compete in the 24 Hours, but the Lexus LC and the newly released GR86 did take part in the Nürburgring Long-distance Series (NLS) endurance race. Test driving was performed in 2023. In 2024, the team competed again in the NLS in preparation for their return to the grand stage of the 24 Hours of Nürburgring. The team's history at Nürburgring is far from over.

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2024

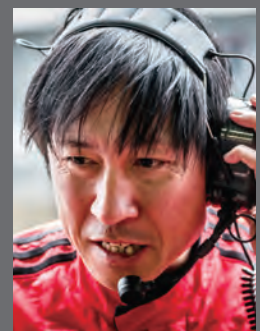
Driving in the Nürburgring

They say Nürburgring refines cars, but even more than that, I think it refines people. That's true both in terms of technique and in terms of spirit. It really changes you emotionally. The times involved in the race are much shorter than those of typical development, so they place a lot of pressure on you, but pressure helps you grow. Racing also teaches you the importance of time and of working precisely. Another valuable aspect of Nürburgring is that it makes you feel that you can't give up, even when faced with time constraints, and you have to keep making improvements right up to the point that the cars are lined up at the starting line. While we don't have targets for race placement, we do have specific, detailed objectives that we pursue, and I'm sure that through that process everyone gets a sense of their own personal growth.



Yasuo Hirata

Nürburgring has provided excellent opportunities to learn the importance of teamwork and of putting people first and foremost. Normally, development is handled by large groups of people, but that tends to lead to less personal investment. With Nürburgring, though, we are all working towards the same objective. If we aren't all on the same page, we can't make better cars. At Nürburgring, we compete against other machines, and, for better or for worse, we see the results immediately, in the numbers (placement rankings and times). Those numbers aren't our ultimate objectives, but they can be frustrating, and seeing them, you think about where you fell short. That's when your mentality changes from just doing what you're told to asking yourself what you can do. I think that's the most vital part of what we're doing.



Toshiyuki Sekiya



Has been in charge of the overall evaluation (product appeal and sensory evaluation) of commercial vehicles for about 10 years since joining the company. Met Mr. Naruse at a driving skills training and learned driving and vehicle tuning skills. Was an early member of the N Team when it was established in 2002. Participated in the Nürburgring 24 Hours Endurance Race from 2007 to 2020. Has been participating in the Super Taikyu Series as the mechanic supervisor since 2021.



Experienced in chassis parts development and dynamic performance evaluation. In charge of the development of the Celstor, LFA, GS-F, and GR86 on the N Team. Participated in the Nürburgring 24 Hours Endurance Race as the chief mechanic for the LFA from 2008 to 2014. Later gained experience as a mechanic in the Super Formula and Super GT, and became supervisor. Participated in the Super Taikyu Series from 2023 to 2024 as the AMG GT3 chief mechanic.

24 Hours of Nürburgring Endurance Race Poster Collection

2007

心ひとつに戦った24時間
その24時間の戦い、その24時間の旅

2007年 第35回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース

TOYOTA LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO.com

2007

味探しの旅、再び。

2007年 第35回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
2007年 VLN ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース

LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO.com

2009

この思い、未来へ
ニュルブルクリンクへの挑戦 2009

2009年 第37回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース

LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

2010

ニュルブルクリンクへの挑戦
"クルマと人"を鍛える珠づくりの旅

2010年 第38回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

<http://gazoocom.com/racing>

2011

ニュルブルクリンクに挑むこと。
その24時間が、明日のクルマと人を鍛える。
戦い続けた旅路、その挑戦は終わらない。

2011年 第39回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

<http://gazoocom.com/racing>

2011

16:00
24:00
03:00
06:00
12:00
FINALE

ニュルブルクリンクに挑むこと。
その24時間が、明日のクルマと人を鍛える。
戦い続けた旅路、その挑戦は終わらない。

2011年 第39回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

<http://gazoocom.com/racing>

2012

挑戦のその先に。
GR GAZOO Racing

2012年 第40回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GR GAZOO Racing

<http://gazoocom.com/racing>

2013

研ぎ澄ませ、
いいクルマづくりセンサー

2013年 第41回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

Re BORN

GR GAZOO Racing

2014

挑戦の年輪。

2014年 第42回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

<http://gazoocom.com/racing>

2015

トヨタと
LEXUSの
ニュルブルクリンク
24時間耐久レース
2015 05.14-15

2015年 第43回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

2016

Nürburgring

2016年 第44回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

2017

道が人を鍛え
クルマを鍛える

2017年 第45回ニュルブルクリンク24時間耐久レース
LEXUS RC F170
LEXUS LFA 50 4WD (トヨタが主催)
LEXUS LFA 51 4WD

GAZOO Racing

LEXUS RC F170

GAZOO Racing

From Naruse to Morizo

ニルは
モリゾの原点

Morizo

2024.9.6

at Nürburgring



Morizo

"Morizo" is another face of chairman Akio Toyoda. He's an "ordinary" guy who loves driving and loves motorsports. He started receiving personal instruction from Naruse in the early 2000s and competed in his first 24 Hours of Nürburgring in 2007. Recently, in 2019, he took part in the race again, driving the GR Supra, returning to Nürburgring after a 17 year absence. He now competes in other races such as the Super Taikyu Series and the TOYOTA GAZOO Racing Rally Challenge, further polishing his driving skills, led by a highly competitive nature recognized by all.

Master Driver Morizo will keep taking on the Nürburgring

Ever since he was young, Akio Toyoda loved driving and dreamed of being a racer. However, the environment he was surrounded by did not make that possible. His sole joy was quietly driving through the mountains.

Decades later, he met Naruse and heard those fateful words, "It's annoying that someone at the top like you doesn't know the basics of driving, but just gets into the car and comments on this and that!" With that, Naruse became his trainer. The two united with the same purpose, but they had no training curriculum.

"We called it training, but I just followed Naruse as he drove his car. It wasn't like he taught me anything specific. The only two things he said were 'Hit the brakes where you saw my

brake lights go on' and 'If the distance between our cars is growing, it means you're not hitting the gas enough.' All I did was do my best to chase after those taillights."

His training partner was the fourth generation, A80 Supra. Production of this model ended in 2002.

"There were some really frustrating times driving at the Nürburgring. The other manufacturers were all driving models that were under development and that they planned to launch in the future. Toyota, on the other hand, didn't have any current-generation sports cars that it had refined at Nürburgring. Instead, the only Toyota car capable of competing was a used, out-of-production Supra. Every time our car got passed by a development car from

another manufacturer, it felt like I could hear them saying to me, 'Hey, Toyota, you can't make a car like this one, can you?' I still vividly remember that feeling of frustration."

After roughly five years of this training, Naruse made a suggestion to Akio, "Why not compete in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring?"

The two decided to participate in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring in 2007 together.

Naruse recalled their discussion. "After about five years of training him, I asked him 'Why not compete in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring?' At first, he struggled with the decision, due to his position, but then after a while he said 'I'd like to do it, so yes, please, let's make it happen.' That said, he didn't just jump into the race, but instead spent the next three years intensively training for it."

His first 24 Hours of Nürburgring was a success, and he made it all the way to the end.

"That said, the race was stopped for about 10 hours due to rain. I just focused on sticking to Naruse's tail, driving while keeping a constant eye on my rearview mirror. Every car that came up from behind overtook me. It was that kind of race. Looking back, I'm surprised that Naruse let me race, and

Morizo in 2007

"It's a miracle that I made it all the way through my first 24 Hours of Nürburgring."





Training days with the 80 Supra

During training at Nürburgring, he felt the overwhelming frustration of driving an out-of-production Supra, but that frustration went on to become the driving force propelling Morizo forward.



2007 Morizo competes in the Altezza

"I made it through safely, without incident. The whole time, I was focused on just two things: 'Stick on Naruse's tail' and 'Check the rearview mirror.'"



2019 Morizo competes in the GR Supra

"I have driven many different cars at the Nürburgring; however, the new Supra gives me greater peace of mind than any of them—I was even able to enjoy a few laps of the circuit."

that I made it back without incident."

The successful completion of this grueling race came to have great significance. Shortly after being appointed president in 2009, Toyota met heavy criticism due to a Lexus ES350 crashing after becoming uncontrollable at high speed. This led to immediate speculation spreading about problems with Toyota's electronic throttle and the Prius' ABS, and Akio spoke in a hearing by the U.S. House of Representatives. Ultimately, it was determined that there were no defects in the cars, but Akio made it through thanks to the words imparted to him by Naruse, "No matter how badly it might go, it's not like they're going to take your life at the hearing."

"I remembered when I was driving at Nürburgring, when I was constantly battling terror, wondering whether I would make it back alive. That experience is what enabled me to get through that hearing. In that sense, not only was Nürburgring the starting point for me as Morizo, the driver, but also for me as Akio Toyoda, the leader of Toyota."

After that, he took class victories in 2009 with the Lexus LF-A, which was still in development, and in 2014, with the Lexus LFA. In 2016, he drove the Lexus RC, and in 2019 he drove the GR Supra, which had returned to the race for the first time in 17 years. Of course, he drove these races as a Master Driver, a position passed on from Naruse.

The finals of the 24 Hours of Nürburgring in 2019 happened to fall on the anniversary of Naruse's death.

Initially, Akio did not plan to take part in the race, but he changed his mind when Hisashi Yabuki, a favorite pupil of Naruse who was responsible for testing the GR Supra, invited Akio to drive.

Following the 2019 race, Akio recounted, "Today is the anniversary of Naruse's death. The third stint was at 10:30. That's when Naruse passed away in that accident. When I put my hands on the steering wheel, at the time that Naruse passed away, all kinds

of thoughts passed through my mind. To be honest, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to drive. If it had been a different day, I would've told Yabuki to drive. But June 23. The Supra. Nürburgring. It felt like Naruse was telling me 'No, you drive! Let's drive together!!' I'm so glad to have been able to take part in that race, driving the resurrected Supra along with the team that Naruse helped raise."

Morizo in 2009

"If you're making a car dedicated to the finest performance, you need to refine it and nurture it at Nürburgring."





When Akio comes to Nürburgring, he travels to a clearing in the suburbs, somewhat far from the circuit. Here, in this clearing where two cherry trees have been planted—the place where Naruse had his life taken in an accident—Akio prays for a safe race.



His first race was a lonely one, but now he has the finest colleagues

Nürburgring was then cancelled for several years due to the pandemic, but Akio kept racing, driving in the Super Taikyu Series as a member of a private team he launched himself, ROOKIE Racing. He remained just as active a racer as he had been at Nürburgring...no, even more active. And through that racing, he connected with even more and more people. At some point, it went from “making ever-better cars” to “making ever-better motorsports-bred cars.”

Akio continued to refine his skills under a new driving trainer, racing drive Masahiro Sasaki, who filled the role once filled by Naruse, and using a data logger. He now has finishing times almost identical to professional drivers.

In 2024, Akio returned to Nürburgring

for the first time in five years.

Speaking about this return, he said, “In the past, I felt fear as I drove, but now it feels like I can have a conversation with the road. I think I’ve developed a bit of elbow room when it comes to driving. Because of all the practice, I’ve got more emotional leeway, and I can see more around me. My field of vision has expanded. That has also enabled me to see further up the road. That said, if one day I find myself unable to drive the Nürburgring to my satisfaction, I’ll resign from my position as a master driver.”

Naruse once said the exact same thing. Perhaps it is the way of master drivers. What would Naruse think of Akio’s driving now?

“He wouldn’t compliment me, he’d

always have a problem to point out (laughs). But I’d hope he’d compliment me for continuing to race in the Nürburgring, and for watching over the Advanced Technical Skills Institute Division (division for training skilled workers), which is made up of Naruse’s pupils. The Institute was dissolved when Naruse passed away, but then we invited anyone who was truly motivated to return, and it was re-established.”

In 2025, TOYOTA GAZOO Racing will resume racing in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring. What does Akio feel about this return?

“Refining people and cars, thereby contributing to the making ever-better cars—that’s always been a constant, in the past and even now. There’s no point to racing in Nürburgring if you



Toyota’s Nürburgring efforts advance to the next level

In the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, sometimes the unexpected occurs. There are issues which never occurred in Japan. These issues, Morizo says, are important. If you work hard and produce good results, it gives you confidence, but even if the results aren’t that positive, you still gain experience. Both of them directly link to making ever-better cars.



Morizo in 2014

“Every car finished and won in its class. I could truly feel how both people and cars grew even stronger.”

don't understand this. But one thing that is different is that now there's ROOKIE Racing, which fills the same shoes as the "original" GR that Naruse and I created, and new colleagues in the form of professional drivers. There are some people who, when they hear 'race,' immediately focus on results, but I think it's the process of getting to those results that matters. In fact, I think cars and people are refined precisely when you don't get the results you had wanted. I feel like here we can all work at the same level, living under the same roof, driving the same cars. It's a place where you work based on your role, not your title. Racing at Nürburgring, surrounded by the finest colleagues one could ask for, this is my starting point."

What makes him keep going back and driving?

"When I was president, there was a lot on my plate, but when I was in the driver's seat, it was like my mind was cleared. I think that's what enabled me to work as hard as I have. But, really, it comes down to something very simple: I love driving. I've heard a lot of complaints that I'm just doing it because I like it, so I've put forth a lot of other reasons, but in the end, it's because I love driving."

Morizo in 2019

“I felt so nervous taking the steering wheel in my hands at the same time as Naruse had died.”



In 2025, Morizo will be taking on the race in the GR Yaris (DAT)!!

“The goal of competing in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring has always been the same, ever since we began in 2007. Back then, it was Naruse and I, but now we have pro drivers, mechanics, engineers...a large, close-knit team. The making of ever-better cars will advance even further through motorsports, and we'll all pull together to take on the challenge of reaching an even higher level.”

Morizo in 2024

By Shinya Yamamoto

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THERE IS NO END TO MAKING EVER-BETTER CARS