



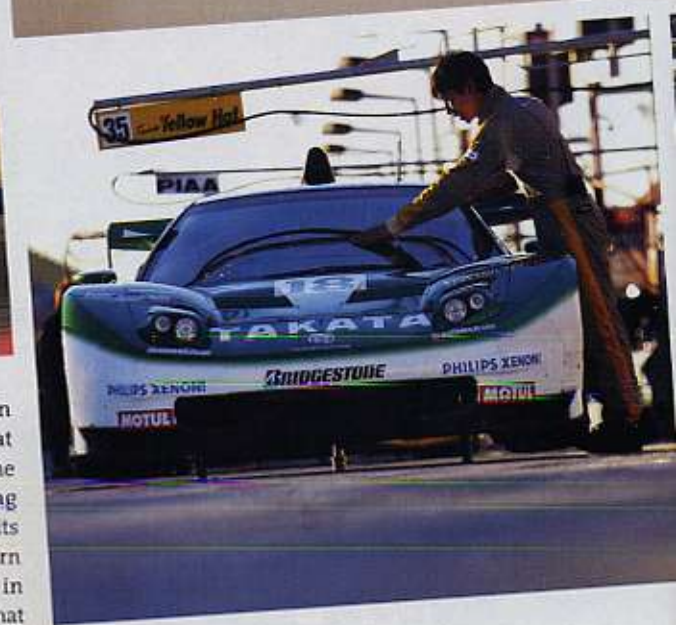


# Turning Japanese



**GT LIVE** BRINGS THE RISING  
SUN'S BEST TO CALI SOIL.

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The word must've gotten back that Americans have stereotyped Asians as horrible drivers. Japan's defense? Send their top grand touring and drift drivers to the US in a Kamikaze mission to show you gas-guzzling-SUV-driving, Big Mac-munching 'Mericanans what's really good!

Let's face it, Japanese culture, while emulating American culture, is now hotter than an Usher/Ludacris/Lil Jon collabo. From heads lining up for Bapes in Soho to vanity mirror cellies, everything JDM (Japanese Domestic Market) is fire. But when it comes to the automotive world, nothing is getting as much attention as the new sport of drifting. Yeah, you've seen it before—the art of driving sideways, but the folks at GT Live wanted you to see it done by the people who started it, the Japanese. "The Japanese drivers want to make a good impression, they go all out," explains Randy Grube, the president of Paramax—the folks responsible for GT Live.

Motorsport in Japan is not limited to that of a sideways motion, the Japanese Grand Touring Championship also held its first race in the Western Hemisphere at GT Live in Fontana, CA this year. What makes the JGTC so hot? Unlike most other races which limit cars by motor size and power additives, in JGTC, the car is only limited by hp. So Vipers go head-to-head with Nissan 350Zs—and lose! Acura NSXs, Subaru WRXs, Toyota Supras, and Porsche Carreras are beaten around the track with the care of a joy-ridden Audi S4 in Newark. Glowing rings scream from overworked brakes behind magnesium wheels, as drivers hit the chicane going what always seems too fast. As darkness falls on the warm winter night, sparks fly as the cars bottom out and trick wig-wagging headlights blast off, telling slower racers to MOVE! And like Luda said "Get the..."

This is the first nighttime race for the series, but the drivers drive just as hard if not harder than they did under the day's shine. And the crowd certainly roars louder every time two cars wrestle for the perfect line. Yes, JGTC drivers are as aggressive as NYC cabbies. If Formula 1 racing was the ballet of motorsport, the JGTC is certainly more like capoeira—a full-contact dance. These cars battle like street fighters. Up close the paint jobs look like cover-up for wounds left from previous scraps.

Two-hundred miles later, the winning PIAA NSX crosses the finish line and within seconds the night sky is illuminated by strobing flashes from the crowd that has rushed to



**THE ONES SLIDING ARE THE DRIFTERS. THE ONES IN PIECES ARE THE JGTC RACERS. GOT IT? GOOD!**

the pits. The driver lunges out of the car and jumps onto the roof of the million-dollar racer with his co-driver. In the morning, they will be told that they actually did not win because of a 60 second pit-stop penalty, but they are on top of the world right now, or at least on top of a beat-up white NSX. Tomorrow is another day.

With the main JGTC events over, the attendees take time on Sunday morning to check out the endless rows of show cars. The NSXs and assorted right-hand drive Supras, Silvias, and Skylines are so impressive, drool

buckets should come with a weekend pass. And for the spectator who wants to get in on the action, hot laps in the JGTC cars are available as well as a chance to show your worth on the autocross track in a Mazda or battle head-to-head on the karting track. While different drift competitions like the Formula D and Xtreme Drift League keep all those addicted to burned rubber transfixed throughout any lull in racing.

The grand finale for the weekend is the D1. But this is no ordinary drift challenge; this is Japan vs. America. The Japanese warm up first; and rocketing into the course at 90-plus

mph, the competition looks fierce. Sadly, as the Americans roll out for warm up, it doesn't seem too promising: spinning out, hitting cones, not drifting—it just isn't a good look for the red, white, and blue. But fear not, drivers like Ken Gushi, and Rhys Millen (so what he is Australian, he drives the American Muscle GTO) step it up. Needless to say, the Japanese bomb harder than Pearl Harbor and take the trophy. But they deserve it—they started this sport. Hey, we will always have baseball, right? How many Matsuis can there be? (D'oh, there's already two!)