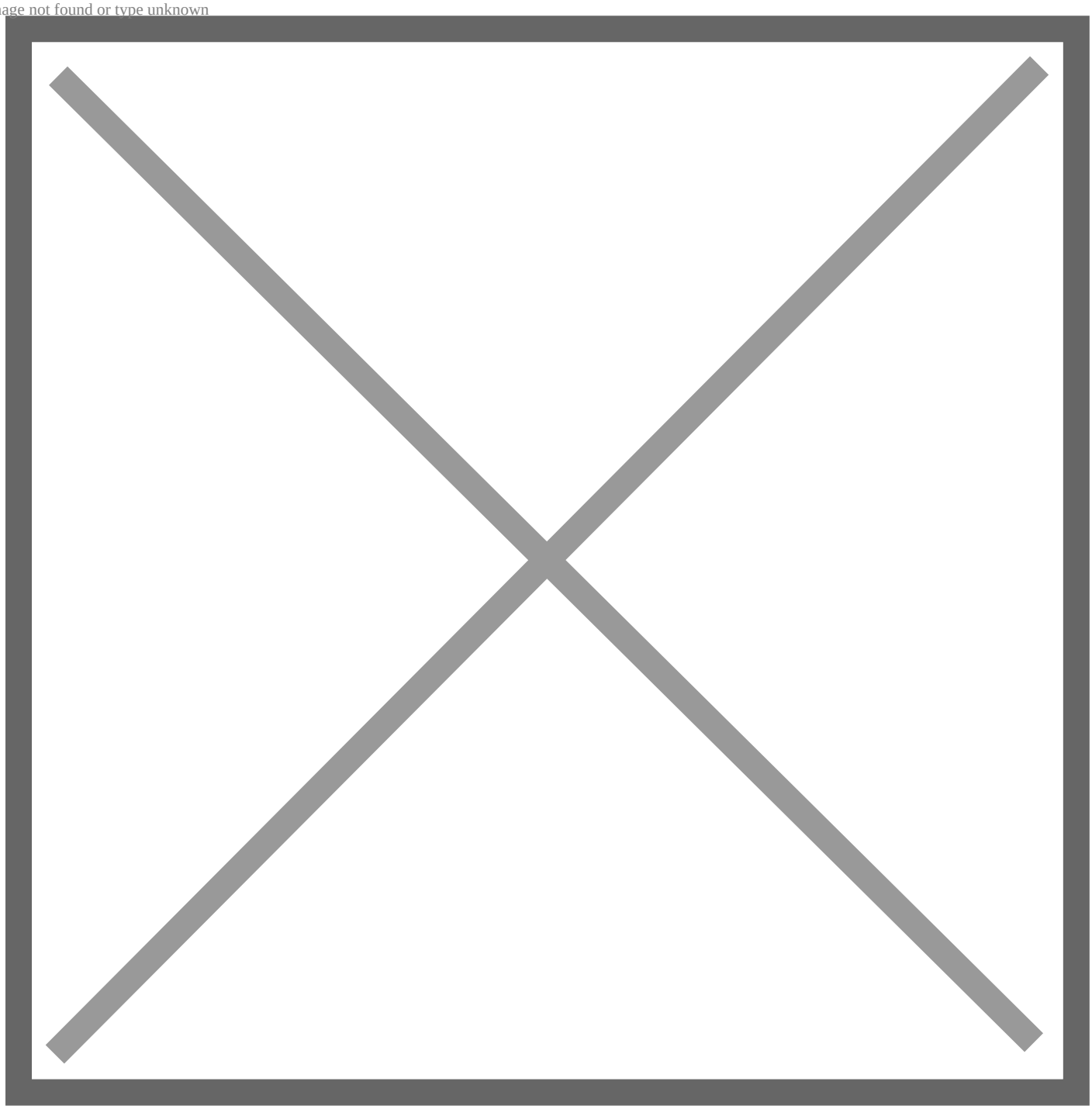
How the Spirit of TOYOTA GAZOO Racing and its Deep Link to Toyota’s Motorsports History are Helping Build Ever-Better Cars

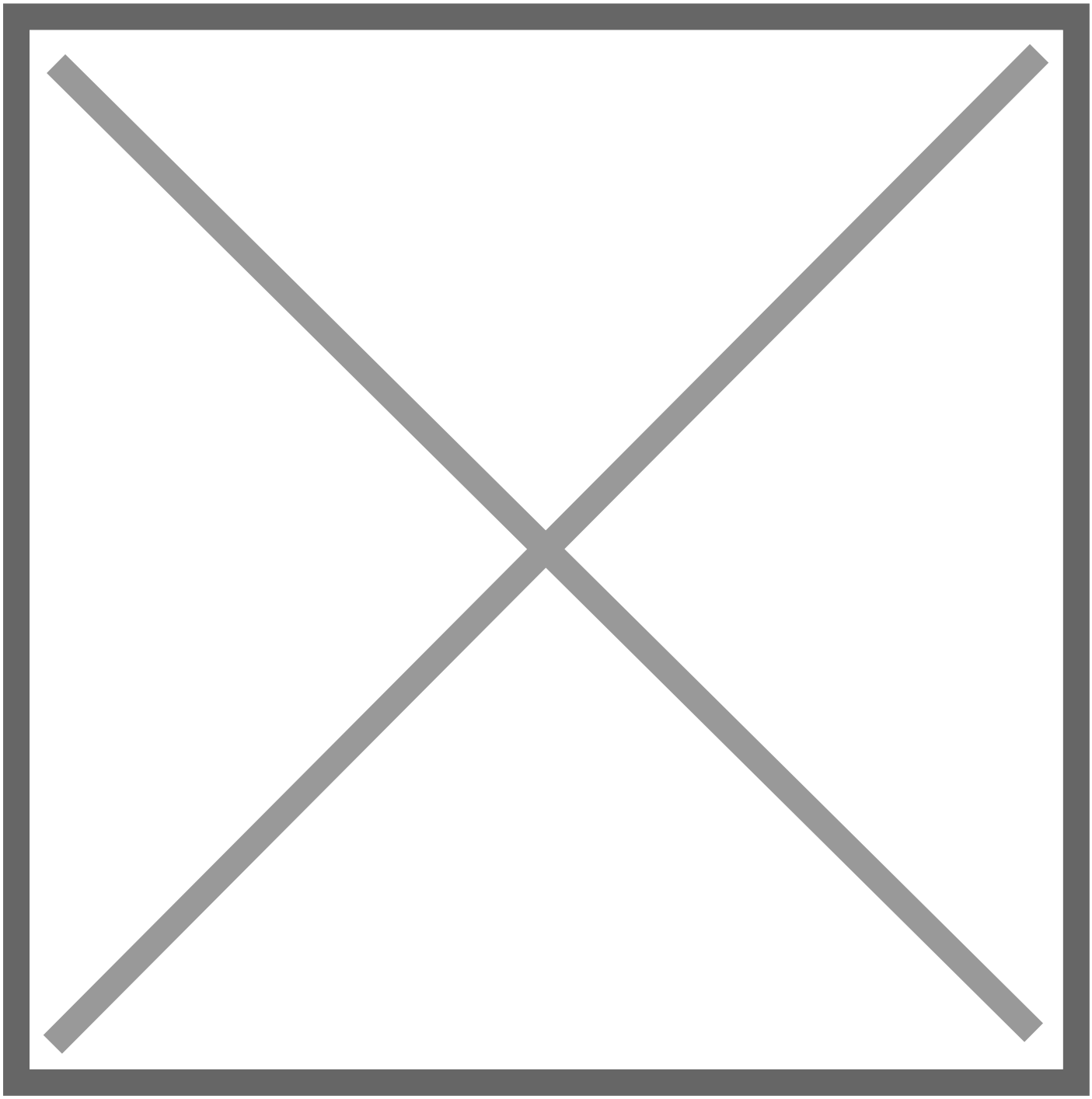
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Growing up as the grandson of company founder Kiichiro Toyoda, Akio Toyoda has always had a passion for the adrenaline-fueled world of motorsports. That fervor for race cars led him to a chance encounter with the late Hiromu Naruse, a longtime Toyota employee (since 1963) and diehard motorsports enthusiast. The pair's meeting would catapult Toyota's standing in the motorsports arena, forever changing the trajectory of the company's performance image and reputation.

Off to the Races



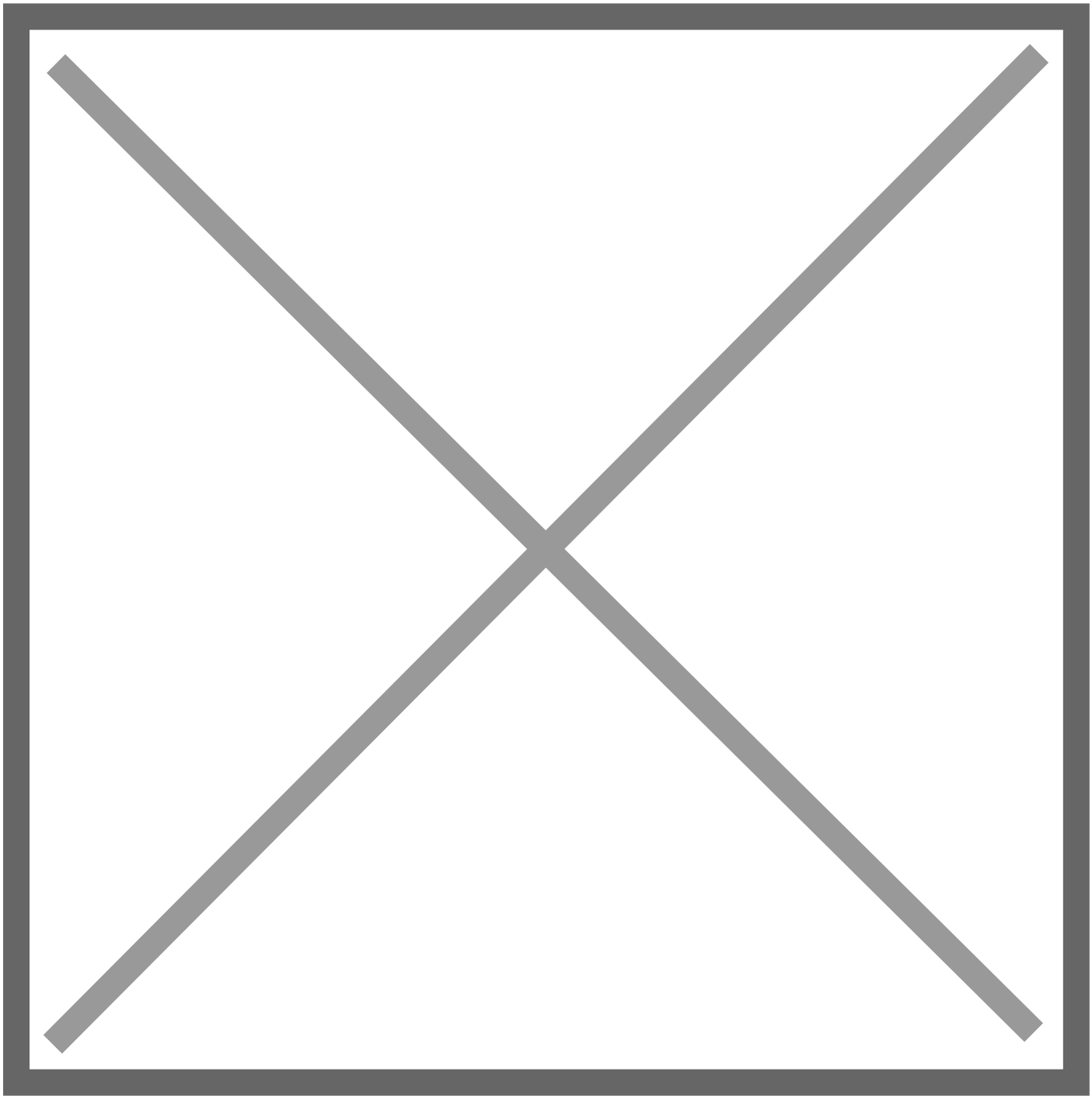
Naruse, who passed away in 2010, had expressed: “Races are the ultimate stage on which to pass on technologies and develop human resources.” He also made a comment that would put Akio in the driver’s seat, literally.

“Somebody in your position who doesn’t know the first thing about driving shouldn’t make passing comments about cars,” Naruse once told Akio. “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.”

Naruse added, “If you feel like it, even if just once a month, I’ll teach you how to drive.”

Akio, surprisingly not offended by his words, agreed with him and took him up on his offer. Through driving and training, Naruse shared his experience and expertise, opening Akio’s mind to different ways to develop ever-better cars. The two shared a mutual love for the quality and craftsmanship of cars and believed that racing them was a great way to improve their performance. Testing at the Nürburgring became a vital proving ground for their philosophy, where they pushed the limits to not only refine each vehicle, but also to educate team members. Through the encounter of these two men, the core philosophy of the GR brand was formed.

The Beginning of a New Era



After spending time behind the wheel and experiencing firsthand what makes performance-oriented vehicles thrive, Akio recognized the opportunity for Toyota to deepen its involvement with motorsports. He believed that racing not only enhances brand image but also drives innovation at a faster pace.

This vision gave birth to GAZOO Racing.

In 2007, Akio Toyoda made his endurance racing debut in the grueling 24 Hours of Nürburgring endurance race, one of the toughest races in the world. Akio chose to race under a pseudonym, “Morizo”, to allow himself some freedom to enjoy participating in motorsports and racing without being recognized as the global leader of

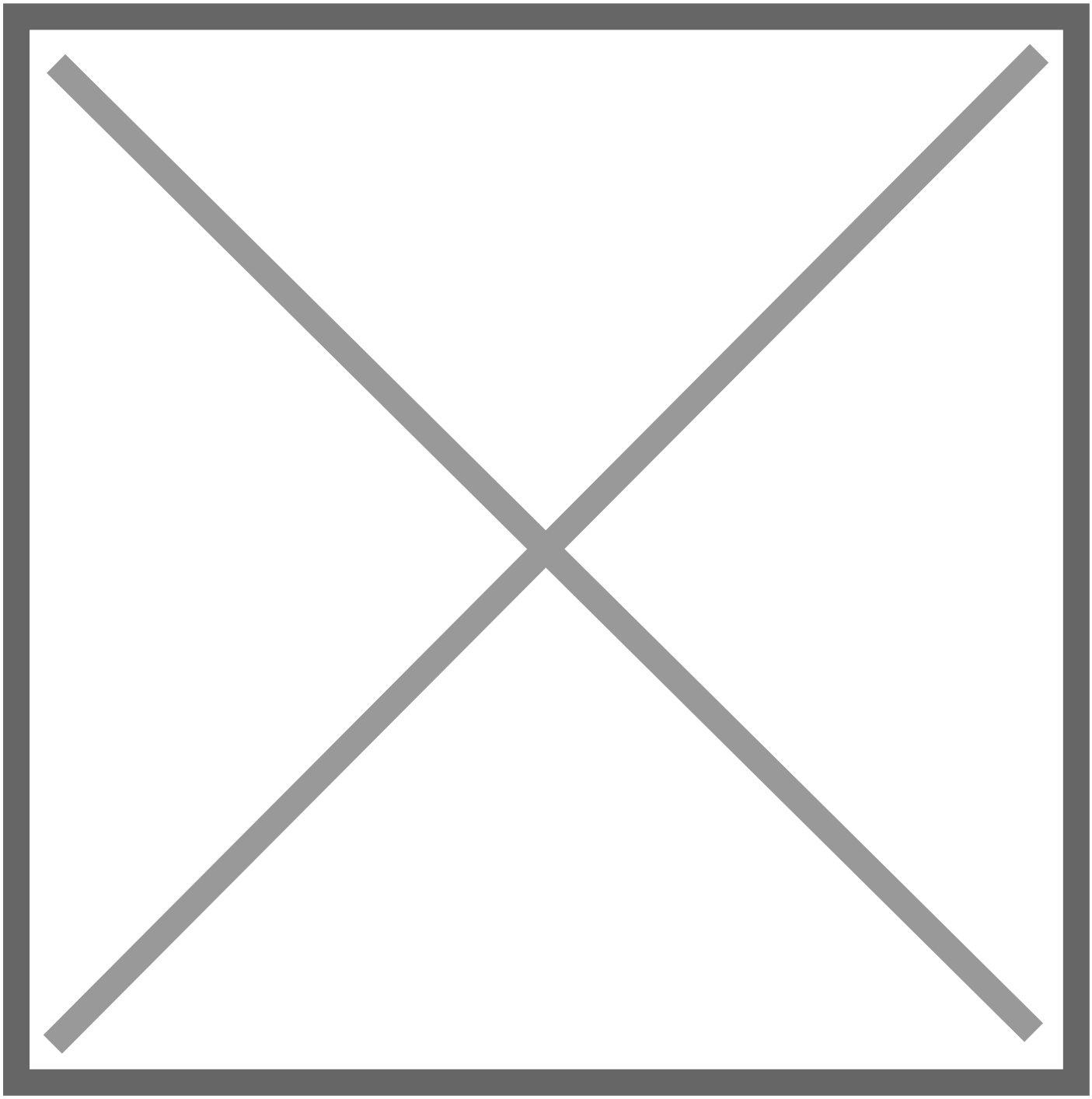
Toyota. The primary goal was to learn from the race, put into practice his training with Naruse and to begin applying those insights to the development of future vehicles. The team included Morizo (also known as Akio Toyoda), Master Driver Naruse and many technical team members to support the race efforts.

While training for the race, Akio faced frustration. He was driving a fourth-generation Supra, discontinued in 2002, and competing with used Altezza RS200s, discontinued in 2005, while other automakers were competing with vehicles slated for release in the coming years.

Despite these challenges, the extreme conditions of the race pushed the team to take their first crucial steps, learning to interpret their cars' behavior and using those insights to refine performance.

Ultimately, this experience became a catalyst for developing performance-oriented vehicles and enhancing the overall driving experience. More than just a pursuit of speed, this venture ignited a culture of excitement and passion within Toyota.

Shifting Into High Gear



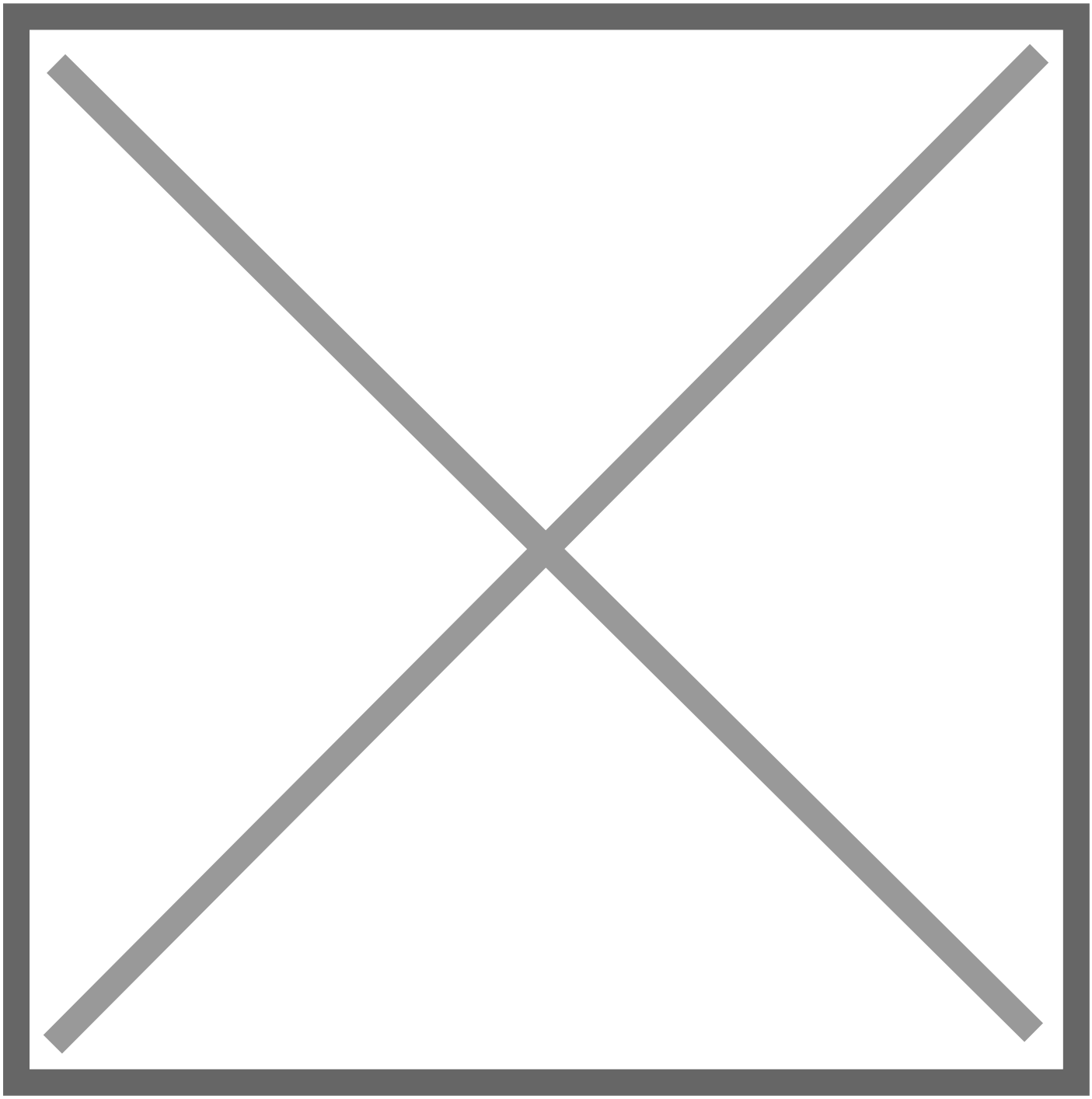
Over the years, GAZOO Racing continued to be a force on the racetrack. While the early days were challenging, the feedback from these racing experiences would lead to critical improvements in Toyota's production vehicles, including the design and engineering of cars like the 86.

For example, the Lexus 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 in the challenge again, aiming to reach even greater heights. The two LFA cars in the competition were modified vehicles, but they achieved speeds that kept them shoulder to shoulder with full-fledged race cars 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 the race. This experience helped further inform the members of the team on how to improve.

One of the significant milestones for GAZOO Racing came in 2014 when, for the first time ever, GAZOO Racing took wins in every class in which it competed. The 86 racing car served as the base for the launch of the 86 GRMN, a limited and exclusive edition. This move was a statement that Toyota was ready to reclaim its place in the world of competitive racing.

On the Fast Track



Fast-forward to 2018, and the Lexus RC, which had raced in Nürburgring since 2015, ended its run, replaced by the newcomer, the Lexus LC.

During the qualifying races, the Lexus LC, which was racing in a high-performance prototype class called SP-PRO, was nearly as fast as the higher performance SP9-GT3 class vehicles. Despite the loss, the race provided a range of new experiences and findings.

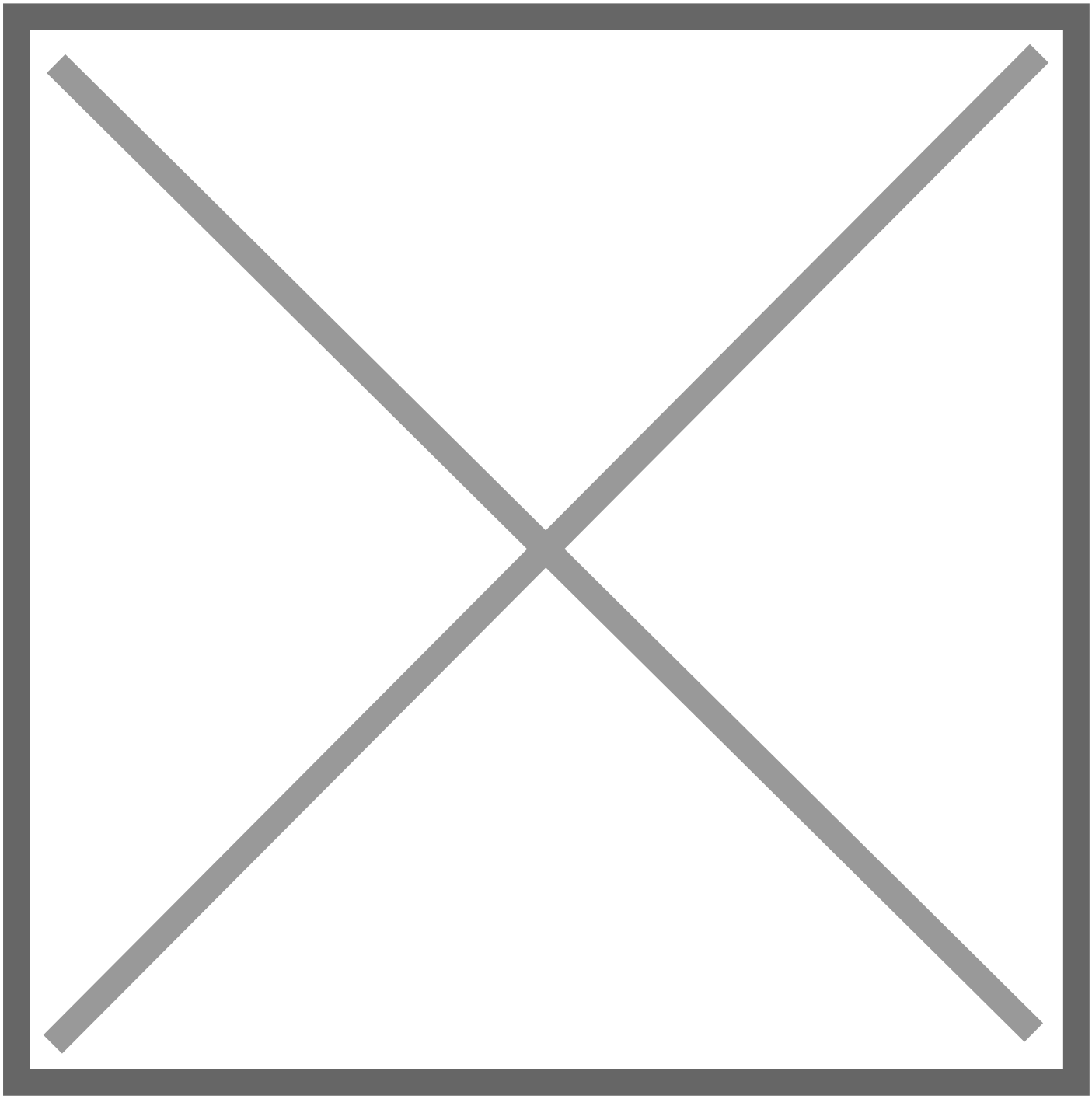
After reflecting on the lessons learned the previous year, we returned to the 24-Hour Nürburgring challenge in 2019 with a completely overhauled Lexus LC. Additionally, we also brought a vehicle back for the first time in

nearly two decades: the Supra. Despite some small issues during the 2019 Nürburgring challenge, the GR Supra managed to complete the race and took third place in its class. The LC, on the other hand, struggled with some frustrating and unexpected problems but gave the team valuable experience and data to improve the vehicle for future races.

After the race, Morizo reflected:

“Today is the anniversary of Naruse’s death. While holding the steering wheel, many thoughts ran through my mind. It felt as if Naruse was telling me, ‘You should drive the Supra; let’s drive together!’ I’m glad I was able to show Naruse in heaven that I fought alongside the team he helped raise, driving the revived Supra.”

The Road Ahead



In 2024, the team competed in the Nürburgring Long-distance Series (NLS) to prepare for their return to the grand stage of the 24 Hours of Nürburgring.

Then in June 2025, TOYOTA GAZOO Racing made their comeback to the 24-hour race – this time, with the GR Yaris and a new team, TGRR.

At its core, GR is dedicated to improving our vehicles and investing in the skills of our team members at every level. Furthermore, the Japanese concept of *kaizen* (continuous improvement) is embodied by continuously challenging our cars and teams to perform in motorsports – learning from every lesson, mistake and triumph.

Building and racing sports cars goes deeper than just automotive passion, it is a commitment to transferring knowledge between generations within our development teams.

Weaving a cultural bond between our work and the ancient Japanese practice of rebuilding their sacred temples, Morizo (Akio Toyoda) once mentioned, “Sports car development is like Ise Jingu’s Shikinen Sengu ceremony. This ceremony involves rebuilding and relocating the entire grand shrine from east to west, or west to east, once every 20 years. In doing so, skills and techniques, including the sourcing of materials for building the shrine, are passed on. Rather than abandoning development because ‘times are bad’, I think it’s vital that, even in times like these, we look to the future and continue to pass on our skills and technologies.”

Akio has a dream to ensure that there are vibrant, dynamic, fun-to-drive sports cars for every generation. GR is a commitment to the car enthusiasts in every generation to continue building sports cars that stir the soul and drive passion into future.

GAZOO Racing’s successful journey is a testament to Akio’s strategy of integrating motorsport experience into commercial vehicle development. The technology and performance lessons learned from racing have since influenced various Toyota models, enhancing their appeal in the market.

“Refining people and cars, thereby contributing to the making of ever-better cars – that’s always been a constant, in the past and even now,” Akio says.

See links below for more information:

- The GAZOO RACING Story
- Why Toyota Takes on 24-hour Endurance Races (Part 1)
- Morizo, Master Driver, President — How Akio Toyoda Transformed Toyota’s Cars
- “Drive, Break, Fix.” A New Base for Nurturing Cars and People in Shimoyama (video)