

Pure and Natural: The Sound of a Supra

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What draws us to a sports car? Perhaps it's the way that light bends around its contours, or how it feels when you steer into a tight turn. Maybe it's the distinctive smell of burnt rubber, or the way adrenaline tastes. For most drivers, it's not one, but all of these things. We're drawn to the way they ignite our five senses.

Toyota's engineers conceived the new Supra GT as a multisensory experience, but sound was first among equals. Developed with a new, nonnegotiable 3.0-liter inline-six engine, the Supra reconnects drivers to the raw, unadulterated sound and experience that comes with driving a sports car.

So, how does one shape the sound of an engine to bring the excitement of a sports car to life? You don't shape it — you preserve it, according to Toyota Supra Chief Engineer Tetsuya Tada.

“When cooking, if the ingredients are good and fresh, you don't have to add extra ingredients. It already tastes great,” Tada said. “It's the same concept when it comes to sound engineering.” In other words, let nature do the talking.

An Aural History

In the world of auto sports, sound has a sprawling lineage. From the revved-up putter of the Ferrari F1 to the banshee wail of the Lexus LFA, the sound of a car can be as iconic as the chassis or any other component. But it's more than just aesthetics: Sound matters to the experience of street driving, too.

Not surprisingly, today's cars sound very different from those of the past. Due to emission regulations and tighter tolerances within the engine, manufacturers have had to adjust their process — and rightly so. What ends up being sacrificed, though, is the purity of sound that captivates the driver. Also reining in the roar of contemporary cars are strict government regulations around noise that have made it nearly impossible to run an exhaust all the way through the back of the car. Tada's task is to work within these limitations, doing his best to preserve a pure sound that ignites the senses.

A Process of Preservation

Tada's philosophy is to coax and protect rather than force.

That's why he didn't set out to create a sound. Instead, he believed that if the initial sound could be unrestricted, the voluptuous vroom that typifies the aural racing experience could issue forth. Tada was adamant about having the inline straight six. With no unnecessary vibrations and no unnecessary noise, the engine provides a “wonderful, piercing sound that just travels forever.”

“When that natural sound reaches the driver, that's when he can really feel the condition of the car. The driver can react to that, which allows him to drive and control the car better,” he said. “That's what makes it fun.”

Fun and classic. In the whisper-quiet era of hybrid and electrified vehicles, Tada believes this may be the last time he can offer up a car with a crisp, raw sound. It is his gift, of sorts, to the enthusiast and the car community.

“Being able to create a car like this, I'm hoping that enthusiasts will be able to enjoy it for the next 20, 30 years moving into the future.” On sound that travels forever, the road is open.