

20. Super Supra Fans

November 21, 2019



In this episode, we talk to Miguel Jimenez, who runs the largest Supra event in the country. Miguel walks us through what happens at this annual event in Vegas and gives us the scoop on the differences among 1st gen, 2nd gen, 3rd gen, and 4th gen Supra owners. Plus, Stephan Papadakis of Papadakis racing talks to us about how he modified the 2020 Supra engine to get it to 1,000 horsepower.

Full transcript below.

<MUSIC INTRO>

Tyler Litchenberger: All right, everybody. Today on Toyota Untold, if you didn't know, now, you know, this is the year of the Supra, Kelsey.

Kelsey Soule: I know.

Tyler Litchenberger: At the Detroit Auto Show back in January of 2019, we unveiled it there. It launched in dealerships in July-

Kelsey Soule: July, yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: ... to much fanfare. And if anybody wants to hear about this, go back to Season 1 and listen to our Supra episode. But today, people are able to see the vehicle, they can walk in.

Kelsey Soule: It's great.

Tyler Litchenberger: I saw one in our garage the other night. It looks good.

Kelsey Soule: In your garage, at your house?

Tyler Litchenberger: No.

Kelsey Soule: Surprise.

Tyler Litchenberger: Unfortunately not. The kids don't fit in the back.

Kelsey Soule: Oh, yeah, that's probably true.

Tyler Litchenberger: I think people have been waiting to get their hands on it. In today's episode, we've got two people we're going to be talking to. The first is Miguel Jimenez, and he runs the largest Supra event in the country.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. So, I feel like if you didn't know or if you're not part of the Supra cult, everyone should know that Supra has a cult following all the way from the first back in the '70s and '80s. People love these cars so much that they have an entire event in Vegas where people from across the United States and, sometimes, Canada come to bring their Supras,

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Sometimes, they race them. They take a little drag drive out in the, I guess, desert.

Tyler Litchenberger: Into the desert, yes.

Kelsey Soule: And then, also like down the Vegas strip.

Kelsey Soule: So, we talked to Miguel, who tells us all about the event, what people can expect if they want to go. It's open to everyone. You don't even have to have a Supra. And we have some audio from the event where they do testing. So, if, you know, hearing an engine getting wrapped up really gets you going, this is for you.

Tyler Litchenberger: Get that Supra on the dyno.

Kelsey Soule: Right.

Tyler Litchenberger: Later in the episode, we're going to be talking to Stephan Papadakis of Papadakis Racing. He actually took one of our stock Supras for SEMA, and he reworked the engine to make it a thousand horsepower. Quick disclaimer: That vehicle is a special project car, modified with non-genuine Toyota or Lexus parts and accessories. Modification with non-genuine parts or accessories will void the factory warranty, may negatively impact vehicle performance and safety, and may not be street legal. Alright, now that we got that out of the way.

Kelsey Soule: Supra lovers.

Tyler Litchenberger: This episode's for you. Let's get into it.

<CAR ZOOM>

Tyler Litchenberger: So, today on Toyota Untold, we have Miguel Jimenez. You started, like, the biggest Supra event in the US, and quite possibly the world.

Miguel Jimenez: Yes. It's actually, I'll—I'll do this properly, so that the old Toyota guys don't get upset-

Tyler Litchenberger: All right.

Miguel Jimenez: ... if they hear this. Supras Invade Las Vegas was the original one.

Tyler Litchenberger: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: And it kind of died off in 2009. I finished my Supra in 2010. So, I was never able to attend it. So, at that point, I'd already—you know, I was good friends with, you know, some of the core guys in Southern California. And we just said, "We need to have something, you know, again. I mean, it can't just die out." I started a new one called Supras in Vegas in 2010. It was the first one. Literally on the fly, two months of planning. So, there's only 20 Supras that showed up.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: But we had a lot of fun. And it was myself and who has been my title sponsor from the beginning, draftmotion.com, who's also a huge Supra provider of parts, and owns a new one, by the way. It's a launch edition.

Tyler Litchenberger: Of course, it is.

Miguel Jimenez: Just so you know, it's one of the first 1500.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: So—but, yeah, Aaron—Aaron and his group, and—and we just built it up from there. Within—by the fourth year, we were up over 150 cars,

Kelsey Soule: First of all, how did have—know 20 people to get the first one started? Like, how did you know 20 people that had Supras?

Miguel Jimenez: Basically, contacting people from past events. At the time, supraforums.com was very popular.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: In the last few years, it's kind of died off. Facebook and Instagram have kind of taken over-

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: ... all forums basically. So, we—we all were in communication through there as well. And 20 is not a big number. And it was most—it was, literally, my buddy, Dave, from—from Arizona, and my buddy, Doug, from Utah, and the rest were all California guys.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: So, this year, for example, there's 16 states being represented. We've been as high as 22 different regions because, the last two years, we've had people from British Columbia and Eastern Canada come down too.

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, wow!

Miguel Jimenez: So—with their cars. So, it's—it's grown quite a bit. So, it's—it's really cool to see that growth. But the community was out there.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: It was just you need to find it.

Kelsey Soule: So, what's the draw for Supra owners across the United States? You know, they have the communities online that they can talk to one another, and share pictures, stories, whatever. So, why do they come together in person?

Miguel Jimenez: I think that the draw is the people. There's literally close friendships that we've built over the time I've been in that community from the beginning to now.

Kelsey Soule: So, it's really more like a family? Like a community that's been created.

Miguel Jimenez: It really is. I have close friends in—in the pack northwest in Washington, and I've driven up to their event. They have an event every year as well in June-July. Smaller, but—and that draws in the British Columbia crowd, the Oregon and Washington crowd. I see them once a year-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... in Vegas. They still come down-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... all the way. So, it's definitely a family affair. I've literally seen my buddies, Doug, his Supra from Utah. He's come every single year from Utah. I've seen his kids grow up from not having kids-

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... to, now, he has three-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... over the last nine years. So, it's that type of environment.

Miguel Jimenez: We don't make—I don't make money on this event.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: It's not what I started it for. That was the first thing me and Aaron talked about was that we're not trying to make money here.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: If I can break even, and I'm not paying at the end of the year for this event, I'm fine with it.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: You know. And that's where we're at. So, every year you get 20-30 new faces. So, it recycles. it's really nice because we're starting to see a little bit younger crowd come into the older Supras. It's what—you know, it's just like you see in the hotrod community, you know, which is cool.

Miguel Jimenez: But it's turned into a great event, and it's turned into a great community. And I've gotten to meet—there, we get people that travel from—you know, internationally, travel out to Vegas without their cars just to attend the event. We've had people from Germany. We've had people from-

Tyler Litchenberger: Japan, right?

Miguel Jimenez: From Japan? Yes.

Tyler Litchenberger: I mean, there's been engineers.

Miguel Jimenez: A couple of your executives showed up one year.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ...That was a surprise.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: It was a good surprise. We've had Calt Design bring out the FT1 one year. I think it was 2013 or '14. That was awesome, you know. So, we've had a lot of cool, small and big experiences throughout the years with the event. And, you know, we—I honestly, in 2010, I don't know if I could've told you it'd be almost 10 years.

Kelsey Soule: So, why Supra? What's special about the car?

Miguel Jimenez: For me personally?

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, for you, and then your general consensus about, like, the feelings of the people that are with you.

Miguel Jimenez: I'll start with myself. My family wasn't a huge car family by any means. My dad liked looking at cars, but they're all old cars and classic cars, which I love. But the Japanese import community

draw—is where I gravitated to. I opened a shop in 2001, late 2001-2002, in my hometown and right at the start of when drifting became popular-

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: ... or was becoming popular. So, I've known a lot of these guys in the Formula D stuff, pro guys that have been around for a long time before they're ever pros, right.. The—the reason why I got a Supra is, actually, I had—I've owned five Rx7s, five Nissan 240SXs. And my last Nissan 240SX, I was going all in. We had it—it was going to be a complete restoration, basically. I had picked up a 2JZ motor to put in it. At the time, no one was doing that. It was very—not very popular. Now, everybody could-

Tyler Litchenberger: Where did you find just a 2JZ motors?

Miguel Jimenez: I had to look around. I got lucky.

Tyler Litchenberger: [Crosstalk] .

Miguel Jimenez: There's a guy in town that had tried to put it in a Volvo, and he couldn't get it to work. He sold this to me for cheap-

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, man.

Miguel Jimenez: ... because I've been working on cars before. I don't really work on Supras, and the C300s, and stuff. I had extra parts laying around. So, I put this all together. And then, someone ran a stop sign and hit my 240SX. It wasn't a major action, but they totaled the car. And at the time, it was worth some money because of fair market value, everybody wants a 240 to go drifting. This was 2008-2009.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: So, what do I want to do? I didn't want to get another 240 because it was starting to be the Honda Civic of my era, which has everybody had one.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: So, I loved the fourth generation Supra and I love the '80s generation cars because—and all the Rx7s I owned were second gen Rx7s, which were all, you know, '86 to '89. So, my wife found a 1987 Toyota Supra, and she said, “Why don't you put the Supra engine into a Supra. No one's doing that, right?” No one's really going all in on those on that generation. So, that's how I ended up in that community.

And from that point, I met a bunch of people that Toyota knows now well, like Nick [Sosnowski] , who's a good friend of ours, and really brought me into the community. And then, Aaron from Driftmotion and a bunch of other people that are involved with the—with a—with—with Toyota direct in their booth last year at SEMA and everything. It's really cool. So, that just grew from there.

Tyler Litchenberger: Is there a difference now that the Supra is on dealer lots? Does that change the dynamic?

Miguel Jimenez: It does in a weird way. I know there's a lot of people excited to actually see it in person to where they can touch it because a lot of people haven't gone to the dealership to look at it or being close enough to it other than YouTube videos and photographs. The purist guys don't want to accept it for some reason.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right. We know.

Miguel Jimenez: I'm a car lover. and I love driving on the tracks. I have a history of drifting. I have a history of road—you know, being involved with drifting, road racing, all that. So, to me, it's, how does a car perform overall?

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: That's what I wanted to see. From the beginning of the announcement, I was just waiting to see how it performed. Luckily enough, I knew a lot of people that were involved in Spain when you guys did the test drive.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: And I got firsthand right away, "Dude, this car is pretty awesome." It drove great. And I'm talking people like Fredric Aasbø, Ken Gushi, Garrett Yamada, who—who works for you all. And mind you, it's not an endurance road race challenge they were driving.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: But these are people that, for example, Ken Gushi, I've known him since he was 16, in the drift community.

Tyler Litchenberger: Really?

Miguel Jimenez: Oh, yeah. I've known him for a long time. I worked with him through my normal job. You know, in regards to his race team now with GReddy and all them, I've known a lot of those guys for a long time. So, their—their feedback means something. At least, to me it did.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: You know, so. And then, as soon as it went out to the media, and you got to see the YouTube videos, and you got to see the car driving, you know, you're like, "Okay." And then, to me, it was—I always knew that it—it was still going to be a Toyota regardless of—you know, earlier I said regardless of how the—what the sticker says on the suspension component. It's not like BMW built the car and-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... you're reselling it. You're just using their components, but you put your signature on it. I mean, I guess, the only example I can give is, you know, I coach rugby in San Antonio. You know, just because half the team use Adidas doesn't mean it's going to be that great.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: It has nothing to do with what ingredients other than how myself and my coaching staff are preparing those ingredients, you know, whether we were division three national champions.

Kelsey Soule: It's a humble plug.

Miguel Jimenez: But, I would say it's a 50/50. A lot of people really are interested in seeing it up close. And I think we have 10 total A90 Supras coming out to the event this year. So, they're going to really get a good look at it.

Kelsey Soule: What do you think it's going to take for the—the other 50%?

Miguel Jimenez: We'll have to see it. I think the biggest thing right now is to see how the car performs overall.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, tell us about that event overall. What are people getting to experience?

Miguel Jimenez: The events, basically, follow the same type of foundation. It's a three-day event. It used to be a two-day. But once we started getting beyond those 60 people, it'd be—60th registered cars, we turned it into a three-day event. So, everybody usually gets in on Wednesday midweek. And I would say about 90% of the registered attendees coming on Wednesday evening. Thursday morning, we get together at our host hotel's parking lot, and we check everybody in. And it's—you know, just come and get your goody bag, check in. And then, about two hours later, I make an announcement because we always started off with a scenic drive.

This year we're going—for the first time, we're going up North East Las Vegas to the Valley of Fire, which I've never been to.

Miguel Jimenez: You know, we usually have a couple of guys that are—you know, that either are photographers or, you know, have the equipment, with video equipment, and whatnot. And—and we all share it at the end of the event, they'll be up ahead photographing a line of cars, you know. And it's really cool to see—

Tyler Litchenberger: That's awesome.

Miguel Jimenez: ... a line of a hundred cars, just any car, you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: I was going to say it must be like a spectacle to people who are not involved in the event when you drive by.

Miguel Jimenez: it's always funny to see their face when they see all of us show up at once.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: They love it. I mean, it's just—you know, not every car is a show-winning car, but that's not the point. I got really close friends in the community that they haven't been able to finish their cars, but they still run, and they still make the drive. And again, that's why it's not about the cars. A hundred and—140—140 plus cars, you know, you might have a group of 30 that are elite, you know, if that, to that level. But everyone's driving the same, so.

Tyler Litchenberger: What do you consider an elite? An elite Supra?

Miguel Jimenez: Oh, man. Because everybody's got their own view, right, of what an elite car is in any division. But it's just that—and it doesn't even need to be modified. I've seen elite status on an OEM level where even the car mileage may not be low, but, you know, you got 100,000 plus miles on a car, but you can still eat off the engine bay.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: And this guy drives his car everywhere, you know. The paint is immaculate. You know, the—the way they’ve set up the suspension, the wheels, and all the modifications, they—it looks like it should be that way. I think in any car community, that’s what you’re looking for. You know, inside and out, just pristine. maybe 10 people tow their cars, 10 to 15. You know, there’s a couple of long haulers from Connecticut-

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: ... from Florida, they have their cars transported. But most everybody is driving their car there. So, you’re seeing some really show-winning cars.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Wow.

Miguel Jimenez: And you know. So, it’s really cool. So—and also, you know, the power, you know, there’s a dyno they involved in the event. So, I mean, day one is just scenic drive. It’s really chill. It’s just basically a great meet-and-greet. A lot of people know each other, a lot of new faces, everybody gets together to get—basically, just to get a taste. Thursday night’s open, nothing scheduled. Generally, the second day is always the car show, the Show and Shine. This year, we’ll be at Speed Vegas for the first time, which is a driving experience location. And that was set up through Sam Du who I know you—Toyota knows well—

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... from Super Street Magazine. I’ve known Sam for a while as well. And they stepped up with that. He’s bringing his Supra as well. That would be a cool event. It always is. Everybody really gets to just hang out, clean up their cars really nice. So, I think, we’re doing 32 awards this year.

Kelsey Soule: So, I have two questions for you that are unrelated to the event, but related to the Supra. So, you said that, obviously, there’s like different people that are part of different generations. So, like over the overall family, you’ve got the second-gen people, the third-gen people. How would you differentiate these people? Obviously, the cars are different. But like, are their personalities different? Are you like, “Oh, that’s definitely a third-gen person”?

Miguel Jimenez: Oh yeah. Oh, yeah.

Kelsey Soule: So, how—

Tyler Litchenberger: That’s a first-gen.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: Just like any community.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: You know, you got the classic Mustang guys, and they’re always bickering at the new Mustang guy. Going to the Porsche community, gosh, don’t—don’t get involved in that argument. But no, the—it’s not, I want to say, as aggressive as some of those other communities. But the second-generation people

like to stick to themselves a little bit, not in a stuck-up kind of way, but they're are smaller communities.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: So, they all—most of everybody who has a restored or modified one, they know each other-

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: ... because there's not a lot of them. And it's not the popular car. So, they're a tight-knit community. There's 10 cars registered, and they come from California, Arizona, mostly West Coast cars.

Miguel Jimenez: The third-gen community, that is—that's a melting pot.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: You got some guys that are—that are, basically, the come—they're younger, and they come from the—it's a drifting world. So, their modifications are a little—they're a little more extreme in regards of the looks and how the car sits. It's got some power, but it's not crazy, you know. And it's the younger crowd.

And then, the other half of the—of the third-gens Supra community are the guys like me, who are older. We have a little bit more, I guess, technical approach to it. We want to make it look good, and the cars do look good, but it's—it's very much more Feng shui, if you will, organized. But everybody gets along well in the Mark III community. That's—that's kind of the chill community, if you will.

The Mark IV community, in my experience, they have a reputation of like they're real snobby. Not all of them. That's actually not even 50% because I have a lot of good friends in that community. They have the echelon of the older generations, you know-

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: ... the car that put the Supra on the map-

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: ... you know. And don't say it's the fast and the furious car on any of those guys because they-

Kelsey Soule: I want to talk about that.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: I want to—like that's a fair question. Do you think—like, what do you think that that impact that movie had on it?

Miguel Jimenez: It had a huge impact on it.

Kelsey Soule: Right.

Miguel Jimenez: I don't want to say it put the car on the map. I think it just brought more attention to that and the import community, in general.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: I mean, I was—when I saw the preview for that movie you know, 2001, you know, I was two years out of college. It was-

Kelsey Soule: That's like right up your alley.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: I was like 23 at the time. you know.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: And I was like, "Oh, my God. This is so cool." And then, when I watched them, I'm like, "Oh, my God. It's so inaccurate." Because I'm a technical person, but it was still a cool movie. And honestly, I know a lot of people in the Supra community that are young, that are now in their '30s that that movie was the reason why.

Kelsey Soule: They wanted the Supra.

Miguel Jimenez: Yes.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Tyler Litchenberger: Okay. So, day two is Show and Shine. What is day three?

Miguel Jimenez: Day three is the dyno day.

Tyler Litchenberger: What happens at dyno day?

Miguel Jimenez: So, basically, you drive the vehicle onto these rollers. So, they hook up a sensor to pick up the ignition—the ignition signal, the RPM. And all of it is displayed on a computer, you know. And then, the person in charge, the shop will drive the car, whoever it is they choose drives the car on the dyno like they would drive it on the street. Now, you can go through all the gears, you can set resistance on it, et cetera. Well, based on how fast it spins those wheels, it measures the output of the power of the vehicle.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: So, part of every performance car meet is, you know, who's got the best horsepower? Who's got the powerfulest car. Powerfulest, that's not even a real word.

Tyler Litchenberger: It is now.

Kelsey Soule: Most powerful is fine.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: But—so, that's always a popular event.

Kelsey Soule: Okay.

Miguel Jimenez: We usually get about 20-25 cars that are pre-registered to run their cars on there. The strongest car we've had in our—in our nine years, we've had two cars go over a thousand horsepower.

Kelsey Soule: Wow!

Miguel Jimenez: A lot of those cars don't come out very often anymore because they're, basically—the value of them has gone up, especially most of them are fourth generation. So-

Kelsey Soule: Well, then you want to preserve it.

Tyler Litchenberger: Save it.

Miguel Jimenez: They've been preserved, yes.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: But the dyno day is definitely more laid back. We've done it at the same place every year for the last five years. The gentleman who owns All Access Tuning in Las Vegas is Devin. And he was one of our original 20 people. He had a—

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, wow!

Miguel Jimenez: ... third generation Supra at the time.

Tyler Litchenberger: He answered your call.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right. If people want to go next year, and they want to bring their Supras, what do they need to do?

Miguel Jimenez: Register early, early.

Kelsey Soule: You got to plug that website.

Tyler Litchenberger: Come on.

Miguel Jimenez: It's suprasinvegas.org.

Tyler Litchenberger: All right.

Miguel Jimenez: And Instagram is @suprasinvegas.

Kelsey Soule: So, grab your Supras. Register early-

Miguel Jimenez: Registration usually opens up in February. The sooner we get everybody registered, the cooler things we can come up with because, Vegas doesn't wait for anybody.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Kelsey Soule: That's right.

Miguel Jimenez: You know, it's—it's on the community. We can do more—we can do cooler things but, like

I said, it's not a for-profit business that we try to generate with this, so registration is important. But in the end, you don't have to have the nicest car.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: Period.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah.

Miguel Jimenez: You don't even have to have a car, you know,

Miguel Jimenez: We haven't charged for spectating in four years.

Kelsey Soule: Wow!

Miguel Jimenez: So, the Show and Shine is free to public. The Dyno is free to the public if you want to come watch.

Kelsey Soule: Well, thank you so much for joining us today. We loved having you and hearing your perspective on this community.

Miguel Jimenez: Yeah. Thank you, Toyota and y'all. It was great. It's— honestly, it's very cool to be here.

<CAR ZOOM>

Kelsey Soule: Straight out of Vegas, here's some audio from the Supras in Vegas event.

<CROWD NOISE>

Miguel presenting award: I haven't seen this car since all the revisions he did to it. And today I got to. It's an awesome car and I think it's well-deserving. Look at all the little details on this Mark IV Supra. The style of fittings used, the clamps, everything. Extremely well-built engine bay. Eric Lam!

<CROWD APPLAUSE>

Tyler Litchenberger: All right, Kelsey. So, apparently, what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas.

Kelsey Soule: Not for these people because we have their audio on file. So, just like Miguel said, you don't have to have a Supra to go to the Vegas event. If you're just into Supras and want to take a look, you're more than welcome to register or you can just follow along on social media. Their Instagram is @suprasinvegas.

Tyler Litchenberger: Get on it.

Kelsey Soule: Okay. So, next, Tyler talked to Stephan Papadakis. As we mentioned earlier, he's of Papadakis Racing. So, take it away, Tyler.

<CAR ZOOM>

Tyler Litchenberger: So, today, we have Stephan Papadakis on our show. I'm so excited about this interview because you're like a legend in terms of building race cars and tuning engines. And you're the owner of

Papadakis Racing. You are one of the winningest formula drift teams in the series—series history. You've made 1000 horsepower, four-cylinder, rear-wheel drive converted Toyota Corolla hatchback with Fredric Aasbo, who's one of our drivers. And you were the 2018 SEMA Masters of Motors winner. That's, like, incredible.

Stephan Papadakis: Yeah. We've—we've had a good run.

Tyler Litchenberger: What you're doing for us for SEMA, let me lay this out for everybody. So, we've given you a 2020 GR Supra, and you're trying to make it go from stock to putting a thousand horsepower engine into it, correct?

Stephan Papadakis: That's right.

Tyler Litchenberger: And you started documenting that process in a four-part video series on YouTube. And I've watched the first three. I'm, like, waiting with bated breath for the fourth one to come out. So, how has that process been?

Stephan Papadakis: It's been relatively smooth. The challenge is really coming up to try to make the power. You know, once we really, get the engine running, and put it under a lot of load to try to make that thousand horsepower, that's when the problems could show themselves. But this is a process that we've done, you know, several times before with different engines, like the thousand horsepower engine you talked about that we ran on the Corolla, which is the to—Toyota-based on the Toyota 2AR engine.

Stephan Papadakis: But this is just the first time we've actually, you know, “Okay, let's document it. Let's show everybody the process.” And for me, you know, in other types of motorsports, I think it's really exciting, a lot of stuff that they don't show. You know, I—I get it, the—what happens on track, but I really like to see how stuff is built and-

Stephan Papadakis: ... some techniques that they use and the technology. But you don't see that very much or almost not at all.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Stephan Papadakis: So, we thought it'd be fun to—to share that.

Tyler Litchenberger: Had there been any surprises, challenges, obstacles in this project?

Stephan Papadakis: We went into this engine never seeing the inside of it. We didn't know what we were getting into. Some of the challenges have been, you know, getting a lot of the aftermarket companies to align to the relatively fast-paced schedule we have.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Stephan Papadakis: [00:03:58 They've stepped up as well. So, you know, cross my fingers and knock on wood, it's been—it's been relatively smooth so far.

Tyler Litchenberger: What was one piece of engineering, specifically, that surprised you pleasantly?

Stephan Papadakis: I think that with these modern engines and just modern cars, with the drive towards having lower fuel economy, a lot of the components. They want to make it lighter weight. Less weight. You're moving it, you know, accelerating less mass that you get better economy. The engine, they've got a lot of well-engineered components like the block, and just the engine mounts, and a lot of it where you can tell it's

engineered in a way where it's stiff and strong, yet lightweight. So, there's not a lot of material, but they'll have ribs and different reinforcement features, instead of just having a bunch of thick material like maybe engines in the past.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right. What was your favorite modification that you did?

Stephan Papadakis: That is probably the work that we did on the cylinder head. so, these engines have a certain amount of airflow, you know, in and out. That's what we're trying to do it to get more power. We want to get more airflow in and more airflow out. That way, we can add more fuel, and—and make more horsepower. And the cylinder head has these—the holes, the—the ports-

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Stephan Papadakis: ... and the bowels where the air flows in and out. For different reasons, the factories will have a certain, you know, size and flow. But for us, you know, we're trying to triple the horsepower, we want as much flow as we can. So, there's these really sophisticated flow-testing machines, what they call flow bench, where we put the cylinder head on this testing tool. And we see what the flow is from the factory. And then, our cylinder head guy gets in there and actually makes these ports larger in certain areas to try to get additional flow for our require—requirements. So, in going through that process, it's fun collaborating with Tom, that does our cylinder heads.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Stephan Papadakis: And you know, see what the factory did and try to, you know, realize why they would design the port a certain way. And then, once it's all done, having this, you know, modified component all ready to pull back on the engine.

Tyler Litchenberger: And millimeters of space could really make all of the difference in getting to a thousand horsepower, right?

Stephan Papadakis: Yeah. And there's other things that can happen, like you want to make this hole in the port larger, but if you make it too large, you can enter another part of the cylinder, like where the water passages are and things like that. So, you can't just start, you know, grinding away at stuff without kind of understanding some limitations there may be.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right, right. And I go back to what you said about, you know, it's not fun just to watch me sit around thinking. But what—I—the video shows, the four-part series is all of the partners that you work with to get this done. And your—this isn't just a, you know, 15-second clip in the video. This is time that you're spending with these engineers to really think through these problems, right?

Stephan Papadakis: Totally. And because the Supra has done so well in the aftermarket for a lot of these companies, it's so heavily modified. They have a lot of anticipation that this Mark V Supra will also have along. But a lot of people want to modify it for a long period of time. So, you know, we obviously want to build these parts for the engine that we're building. But in addition to that, these manufacturers want to, you know, work with us, so they can develop these parts for customers to buy as well. So, there's—there's a lot of effort going into this to—to make sure everything is as good as we can design it and then have it great as they can, you know, manufacture it.

Tyler Litchenberger: Was there anything that those partners saw that they thought was unexpected?

Stephan Papadakis: Yes. A lot of the hardware was—was quite good, like the—some of the limitations, you can restart these engines where you want to make a lot of power is some of the hardware, like the—that cylinder head bolts that hold the head down, the bolts that hold the rods together. A lot of the hardware, you can reach those limits as you raise the horsepower.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Stephan Papadakis: But the factory hardware is, actually, quite good. So, some of them, like our ARP, the company, the cylinder head that's for us, they're like, "Oh, we can't—we're not just going to the standard cylinder heads. We're gonna go to this, like, upgraded version that we normally just put on the really high-end racing engines."

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Stephan Papadakis: So, in order to surpass the—the factory clamping loads, plug it into specific on it. Like the factory is so good that—that they really had to put a lot of effort in to—to make them even better.

Tyler Litchenberger: Awesome. I saw that the first video you released has over 3 million views. What is the feedback that you've gotten from launching?

Stephan Papadakis: It's gets interesting. A couple of different things. One is that people really enjoy the in-depth, not only camera work, but being able to see—you know, seeing it, like a lot of those components, very close, but also the narration, and—and how I can explain things, I guess, that might be kind of complicated in a simpler way that's more digestible.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Stephan Papadakis: In addition to that, you know, the car was—in this engine is so unknown that there were some people kind of hesitating whether they wanted to either buy the car, or maybe modify it, or, you know, how much power could take. But actually, after they saw the inside of the engine in this video, they were way more optimistic to, you know, raise the—the turbo boost levels and to push the engine a little bit higher-

Tyler Litchenberger: Oh, interesting.

Stephan Papadakis: ... in horsepower. And they've actually had some great results. I mean, there are several owners that have gotten over 600 horsepower by changing the turbocharger and raising the turbo boost with never, you know, getting into the engine and modifying it.

Tyler Litchenberger: Before you started this project, were you—were you a Supra fan?

Stephan Papadakis: For sure. Yeah, I'm a Supra fan, but I always—you know, the—the cars we've been racing have really been four cylinders. And, you know, the Hatchbacks and stuff like that.

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Stephan Papadakis: So, we really haven't built any Supras here. But, you know, Frederic Aasbo, our driver, yeah. he's been comp—competing with Supras for years. And, you know, he—he really enjoys kind of looking over my shoulder and watching this stuff because he really is into the Supra—into the Supra stuff.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, I really appreciated in the videos, the level of discussion, as you mentioned, kind of

breaking it down of what's happening and what you're doing. It was very action-packed. I feel like I needed to watch each video probably two or three times. But you're going to be doing something similar at SEMA. What—tell us about what you're doing at SEMA this year.

Stephan Papadakis: What we have directly in front of us once we dyno the engine and finish that, we're actually gonna bring it back to the shop. We're gonna totally disassemble it again, clean all the parts, box everything up, including the tools, bring them all to the SEMA show in Las Vegas. And at the SEMA show, in the Toyota booth, we're gonna reassemble the engine on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. So, we'll do like a third of the assembly each day. And by the end of the show, we'll have reassembled it live in the Toyota booth.

Tyler Litchenberger: And you're gonna be streaming this, right?

Stephan Papadakis: That's right. Yeah, it's going to be exciting.

Tyler Litchenberger: Incredible. I'm so excited for that. That will truly give people an inside look, right, especially who are there?

Stephan Papadakis: I think the cars are a huge traction to SEMA, but a lot of people are also interested in engines.

Tyler Litchenberger: Yeah.

Stephan Papadakis: And I think this is one of those opportunities to show, an exciting engine first hand.

Tyler Litchenberger: Have you done something like this at SEMA before?

Stephan Papadakis: Never. This is super rare. This might be a little unprecedented for someone to not only do some assembly like this at SEMA-

Tyler Litchenberger: Right.

Stephan Papadakis: ... but also livestream it.

It's exciting. It's a lot of stress, you know, on my end because I better do it right because everybody's watching. I can't edit it. I've got practice doing one engine already.

Tyler Litchenberger: So, what does the future of Papadakis Racing look like?

Stephan Papadakis: We're having a lot of fun in—in drift right now. And we're having a lot of fun building this YouTube content. So, I mean, for the foreseeable future, the next two or three years, at least, I think we're going to stay on that track and—and get out to the drift events, and try to win, and—and share as much of that as we can.

Tyler Litchenberger: Awesome. Stephan Papadakis, [A], I love saying your name so much; [B], thank you so much for joining Toyota Untold.

Stephan Papadakis: Yeah, for sure. A lot of fun.

Tyler Litchenberger: And if you want to follow Stephan Papadakis on YouTube, his handle is @papadakisracing. That's P-A-P-A-D-A-K-I-S Racing. We had a great time with him, Kelsey.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. No, that was really interesting. I mean, you really held your own on this—with this technical people.

Tyler Litchenberger: I did my research.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah, that's awesome. All right. So, that's all we have for today, all things Supra. Look for us next week as we discuss Making of a Driver. This is like making the band for racers.

Tyler Litchenberger: It really is.

Kelsey Soule: Yeah. So-

Tyler Litchenberger: Kids who become actual race car drivers.

Kelsey Soule: Kids who drive cars before they have their license, and then end up doing it professionally. So-

Tyler Litchenberger: I got to get my kids into this.

Kelsey Soule: I mean, I—I honestly think I missed my calling. I think that I should have been a racer.

Tyler Litchenberger: Absolutely.

Kelsey Soule: Our show is produced by Sharon Hong and Alison Powell. The music you're rocking out to is by Wes Meixner. We are edited and mixed by Crate Media.

Tyler Litchenberger: Thanks again for listening. And if you enjoy our podcast, make sure you give us your feedback, hit subscribe, give us five stars on Apple Podcast, and email us your comments at podcast@toyota.com. And if you want to talk to me on social media, make sure you tag Toyota, @toyota, on Facebook and Twitter, @ToyotaUSA on Instagram and YouTube. Thanks guys.

Kelsey Soule: Bye.