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# YOSHIMURA

## SAMURAI OF SPEED

When it comes to tuning houses, few have built up such a reputation for excellence as Yoshimura; a company of greats



This father and son combination is every bit as important as Roberts and Rossi



Yoshimura's reworking of the GS1000 propelled Yoshimura into the big time

“**B**eing at the track, hearing the sweet song of a finely tuned racing engine at full-chat, is music to our ears. We try and impart this emotion to our customers.” Yoshimura’s President Fujio Yoshimura, son of the company’s legendary founder ‘Pops’, explains what it is that keeps the company buzzing – even after half a century.

Racing is everything to Yoshimura, it’s the cornerstone of the company’s philosophy and is what drives its extensive R&D departments to greater feats of engineering prowess. If it wasn’t for racing Yoshimura wouldn’t exist. The company’s roots are buried at the track and the skills learned to hone every last bhp from an engine proved invaluable to racers the world over. And one man started it all.

Yoshimura Racing is the result of a lifetime’s dedication to motorcycle tuning by Hideo ‘Pops’ Yoshimura. A former wartime aircraft mechanic, Pops turned his hand to tuning engines after Japan’s defeat in World War II. Pops simply made do with whatever materials and tools he could find and used his considerable engineering skills to ensure he got the required result – namely speed and power. People were soon seeking him out to work on their bikes. This was a time when

tuning an engine wasn’t simply a case of bolting on an exhaust pipe, Pops was an engineer first and foremost and would file or hand grind the engine’s components to make them better. And he was good, the American servicemen, whose bikes he worked on, called him ‘God Hand,’ such was his skills.

Soon his business was too big to be run from his home, so he bought a garage in downtown Tokyo and in 1954 formed Yoshimura Racing. A family run business, Hideo employed his wife and children in his new venture and it was this close-knit family environment that led to his nickname ‘Pops’. His wife, alongside her household duties, created moulds for the exhaust pipes, while his children helped by keeping the books and tuning the engines. Driven by his desire to win races and the narrow focus and fanatical

attention to detail that is required achieving this, success soon followed. Yoshimura-tuned engines won races in both the two and four wheeled world but it was victory at the Suzuka 18 hour in 1964 that helped put Yoshimura on the map. Riders Akira Matsumoto, Seiji Ogata and Kazuo Aoki won on a Honda CB77, defeating the Honda Laboratory Team. But Pops had a dream, he wanted to win the Daytona 200 race and so decided to expand the company and branch out into America.

There was more to his decision than just the desire to win at Daytona. As well as a talented engine tuner, Pops was a businessman. He spotted the American’s love of the large multi-cylinder Japanese bikes of the early 1970s and sensed a business opportunity. If he could tune these bikes into winners on the track, success in his shop would follow. In 1971 Yoshimura Research & Development America was set up in Los Angeles, the timing was perfect.

Alongside Honda’s revolutionary CB750, Kawasaki launched its Z1 and production bike racing in the States took off. Pops was ▶

### THE MJN CARBURETTOR

Invented by Yoshimura the MJN (Multiple Jet Nozzle) carb proved both more fuel efficient as well as improving a bike’s throttle response. Unlike a standard carb, the jet needle on the MJN carb is hollow and machined with precision holes on the side. When the throttle is opened the negative pressure from the engine sucks the fuel through the holes, atomising it into a fine mist and improving combustion. Also, when the throttle is shut small amounts of fuel escapes through the holes into the engine, improving the initial throttle response as there is less lag. This is exactly the technology and theory that it has taken fuel injection companies years to develop, and they still haven’t got it right! Fujio Yoshimura invented the MJN carb in 1992!



50 years of hard work and development comes built-in to every Yoshimura product; from race cams to end cans

‘Pops’ at the coal face. Hideo Yoshimura was simply a magician with metal



**HIDEO 'POPS' YOSHIMURA**

Born in Fukuoka City, Japan, in October 7, 1922, Hideo was called into military service during World War II where he initially trained as a pilot. Following a parachuting accident his dreams of flying were cut short and instead he trained as an aircraft engineer. After the war he gained a reputation for being able to modify and tune the BSAs and Triumphs of the US servicemen stationed in Japan using nothing but his considerable skill and some very worn-out parts. In 1954 he took his expertise and opened his first shop, Yoshimura Racing, with the help of his wife, Naoko, who would help make moulds for the exhausts, daughter Namiko who kept the books and son Fujio who learnt the family trade. With a strong reputation and loyal fan base in Japan, 'Pops' as he was known around the shop, decided to take on the Americans. He opened his first shop in Los Angeles in 1971, calling it Yoshimura Research and Development America, after seeing the large multi-cylinder bikes of the day were becoming all the rage in America. Considerable racing success then followed, but it wasn't without pain. In the mid-1970s Pops set fire to an old petrol tank his workshop while testing a bike on a dyno. Pops risked his life by dragging the flaming tank outside, saving the shop from destruction and giving himself severe burns to his arms and hands in the process. In 1981 Pops moved back to Japan to oversee the Japanese operations. Hideo 'Pops' Yoshimura died of cancer on March 29, 1995, leaving behind him a legacy of tuning that remains second to none.

**SUZUKI ASKED YOSHIMURA TO BE ITS OFFICIAL FACTORY RACING ARM**

► there to reap the rewards and it wasn't long before the Yoshimura name was synonymous with wins, a reputation that was cemented when Yvon Duhamel won a superbike production race on a Yoshimura Z1 in 1973. The Yoshi name became a national brand, but this was the tip of the iceberg. In 1976 AMA superbike racing became a national class and Pops ensured that Yoshimura tuned Z1s were at the front of the grid. Success didn't come instantly and it wasn't until a year later that a bike was launched that not only propelled Yoshimura to a new level. It also formed a relationship that is still strong today. Suzuki's GS750 had a far better chassis than the wobbly-framed Z1 and once Pops had worked his magic on the engine he eventually realised his dream. In 1978 Steve McLaughlin won the Daytona superbike race on a Yoshimura GS750, the first of four straight

wins for Pops on the banking. Better was to come. Rising star Wes Cooley was partnered by Mike Baldwin at the inaugural Suzuki 8 Hour on a Yoshimura GS1000. To the surprise of many (although not Pops) they took the win. Yoshimura had taken what was effectively a road bike with flat bars and beaten GP machinery of the day. Back in America, Cooley soon started dominating the superbike field. He took the 1979 and 1980 superbike title on a Yoshimura GS750, a feat that not only put the name Yoshimura on every racer's wish list, but also turned the GS750 in a huge sales success. Suzuki realised the benefits of racetrack glory and in 1980 asked Yoshimura to become the official factory racing arm in America. Maybe Pops felt that his job was done in America, or perhaps he simply felt that at 58 he didn't have the drive to take the company in a new direction, but whatever the reason, in 1981

Pops returned to Japan to concentrate on growing the Japanese side of the business, leaving his eldest son, Fujio, in charge of Yoshimura R&D America. Under Fujio's direction, Yoshimura R&D continued to expand and the 1980s was a breeding ground for racing stars. The advent of the GSX-R750 in 1985 not only introduced the world to what we now know as superbikes, it also unleashed a young Texan called Kevin Schwantz onto the scene. Pictures of Schwantz wrestling the Yoshi GS750 superbike like a bucking bronco and sliding it into and out of every corner soon made him a hero. But it was the Yoshi' GSX-R and Schwantz's 'win or bin' attitude that made him a star. "With Michelin tyres on, the Yoshi' GSX-R was a dream to ride. We won races all year but I crashed too much and lost the title to Wayne Rainey. The bike was good enough, but I was young and stupid," remembers Schwantz.

The 1980s were an exciting time for Yoshimura and under the

guidance of Fujio the R&D department in America was at the forefront of bike tuning technology. In 1986 it invented the Duplex Cyclone silencer, a can designed to overcome ever-tightening noise emissions laws without reducing power, and followed it up a year later with the Sanper exhaust for single cylinder bikes. This was a new direction for Yoshimura and with the street bike market becoming more sports orientated, with bikes such as the GSX-R750 revolutionising the scene, Yoshimura spotted the growing trend for modification. The company opened a dedicated exhaust factory in 1991 and a year later launched the first cans made from titanium and carbon fibre. It even offered a year's warranty on them, putting its money where its mouth was when it came to their quality. To this day, every single Yoshimura exhaust, all 6,000 a month, is hand welded. And it didn't stop there. ►

*Yoshimura's hard work on the 1987 GSX-R750 still looks lush today*



**RACE HISTORY**

Where do you start? Here is just a sample of Yoshimura's racing history:

- 1964** – Won the Suzuki 18 (yes, 18, it was a man's race then) hour race with a CB77.
- 1971** – Bike racer Manoru Moriawaki won the All Japan Fuji 1000km race and Japanese Grand Prix (GTS1) in a Yoshimura tuned Honda S600 car.
- 1978** – Won the Suzuki 8 hour with a Suzuki GS1000 with Wes Cooley riding and Steve McLaughlin won the Daytona Superbike race on a GS1000.
- 1979** – Got 'the broom' at the Daytona 200 and swept the podium, finishing first, second and third on GS1000s. Yoshimura topped the podium for the next two years, making it four in a row. AMA superbike champions.
- 1980** – Won Suzuki 8 hour by the closest time ever. The lucky number 12 from this race bike was adopted by the team for every subsequent 8 Hour race. Second AMA superbike title.
- 1985** – A young rider called Kevin Schwantz tests the Yoshimura bike and finishes third in the 8 Hour. Pop is dissatisfied...
- 1986** – Schwantz and Tsujimoto third in 8 Hour.
- 1988** – Schwantz wins the Daytona 200
- 1989** – Doug Polen and Kevin Schwantz race the 8 Hour but the bike's choke was left on, ruining their chances.
- 1996** – Mat Mladin joins Yoshimura in the American AMA Superbike series
- 1999** – Mladin wins the first of seven AMA Superbike titles! Yoshimura Hayabusa wins the X-formula class.
- 2006** – Ben Spies beats team-mate (in a very loose sense of the term) Mladin to win the AMA title.
- 2007** – Two for Spies! Mladin really not happy.
- 2008** – And the hat-trick! Mladin looking like a bulldog chewing a bee.
- 2009** – Mladin wins the AMA Superbike championship, topping the podium in 10 of 20 races and managing a smile. The Yoshimura Suzuki GSX-R1000 wins the Suzuki 8 Hour.

**THE BIKES**



**Hayabusa X-1**  
 Power: 190bhp  
 Weight: 198kg  
 Based on: Suzuki Hayabusa  
 Limited to: 100  
 Highlights: Tuned engine with high compression pistons, carbon bodywork, 24-litre endurance tank with twin fillers, full titanium exhaust and carbon can.



**Katana 1135R**  
 Power: 150bhp  
 Weight: 197kg  
 Based on: Suzuki GSX1100S  
 Limited to: 5  
 Highlights: 74mm big-bore kit, titanium exhaust, 40mm MJR carbs, magnesium cylinder head cover, carbon carb heat shield, aluminium fuel tank and lightweight wheels.



**Tornado S-1**  
 Power: 167bhp  
 Weight: n/a  
 Based on: 2002 Suzuki GSX-R1000  
 Limited to: 50  
 Highlights: Yoshi cams, increased rev limit and compression ratio, 3-way fuel mapping switch, ti exhaust with carbon can and Yoshi fairing kit.



**M450R Super Motard**  
 Power: 50bhp  
 Weight: n/a  
 Based on: Suzuki DR-Z400  
 Limited to: Made to order  
 Highlights: Carbon bodywork, 449cc tuned engine, 40mm MJR carb, Öhlins suspension, Brembo four-piston caliper, wave discs and titanium exhaust.



**Tornado III Zero-50**  
 Power: 175bhp  
 Weight: n/a  
 Based on: 04 Suzuki GSX-R1000  
 Limited to: 5  
 Highlights: High compression pistons, carillo rods and balanced crank. Öhlins suspension, swingarm, mag wheels, carbon fairing and Brembo monobloc calipers.



Not content with being the best looking bike on track, the Yoshi GSX-R1000 is one of the fastest, too

## “ THE YOSHIMURA HAYABUSA X-1 WON ITS CLASS AT SUZUKA, FINISHING 12TH ”



Using the track as its test bed, Yoshimura developed a whole raft of components such as rearsets, triple clamps and engine cases, all developed to aid its race bikes on track and then converted them for street use – and not just for Suzukis. Then came the bikes.

To showcase its ever-increasing stock of aftermarket parts, in 2000 Yoshimura unveiled the first of its 'limited edition' bikes. The Yoshimura Hayabusa X-1 (dubbed the 'heavy bus' by the Yoshi mechanics) was limited to 100 units and was based around the company's Formula X racer that finished 12th at the Suzuka 8 Hour, won its class and nearly out qualified Haga's R7! De-tuned to a mere 190bhp (it was originally 225bhp!) the X-1 came loaded with Yoshi parts and a price to match.

A year later the X-1 was followed up with the beautiful Katana 1135R (5 made) and then in 2002 by the GSX-R1000-based Tornado S-1, of which only 50 exist, and finally the DR-Z400 based M450R and to celebrate the company's 50th anniversary the Tornado III Zero-50 (named after the aircraft that Pops learnt his trade on), again based on a GSX-R1000. And all the time Yoshimura continued to dominate the race scene.

The start of the 1996 AMA season saw Yoshimura sign Australian Mat Mladin to ride



their superbike. He finished fourth in his first season and after a year with Ducati returned to Yoshimura in 1999 to begin what turned out to be a dominant relationship. Mladin won the 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005 superbike titles before his new team mate, a young pup called Ben Spies, dethroned him in 2006, 2007 and 2008 before bugging off to win the WSB title at his first attempt, leaving Mat to scoop the 2009 AMA title before announcing his retirement. Mladin and the Yoshimura GSX-R1000 remains the most, er, winningest AMA combination ever. What better way to keep the Yoshimura name at the forefront of rider's minds?

To this day the Yoshimura company continues to expand and now consists of three factories in America, one for exhaust manufacture, one as a race shop and a final one for R&D – as well as the original Japanese factory, which is still run by Fujio who returned to Japan after Pops retired. The American business is run by Don Sakakura, a former mechanic who has risen through the Yoshimura ranks, while another former mechanic, Suehiro Watanabe, supervises the R&D efforts, a management structure that gives a strong clue as to what has made Yoshimura such a success. This is a company run by mechanics, drawing on their enthusiasm and technical genius and growing as a result. Success breeds success and with Yoshimura racetrack success has allowed the company to expand and flourish.

Today, Yoshimura is one of, if not the, foremost tuning firms in the world, employing nearly 250 people globally and with a turnover of in excess of £40m. Not bad for a family run business that all started out from a parachuting accident. You may say that was a very lucky break indeed. ☐



### DON SAKAKURA YOSHIMURA AMERICA VICE PRESIDENT

#### What is at the heart of the Yoshimura business?

It's to manufacture quality, high performing products, and support our valuable customer's requirements. Yoshimura's involvement in racing has help achieve these results.

#### What is your best memory of Pops?

It was him enjoying our victory at Daytona in 1981. His immeasurable hours spent developing and preparing equipment for this event was astonishing.

#### Which racer who has ridden a Yoshimura bike has impressed?

Mat Mladin. His acute knowledge of a racing motorcycle and his realistic view-point of a motorcycle's potential have not yet been repeated.

#### With tuning now more reliant on electronics, what lies in the future?

We are just now beginning to utilise the MotoGP level electronic technologies with promising results. With these complex systems, the requirement for electrical engineering support is essential, an instrumental component to achieve positive results. Yoshimura will continue to support this direction.

#### Does race success equal sales success?

Yoshimura utilises our racing technologies to develop commercially available products to our consumers. So, I truly believe our racing successes have influenced our product sales.

#### Have road bikes such as the GSX-R1000 now hit a power ceiling?

I believe performance enhanced production motorcycles are always going to draw a huge interest. For example, the majority of the population will never utilise the S 1000 RR's full potential, but perhaps our inner egos dictate our spending habits...

#### I've got £1,000 to spend on my bike, what is the best way to make it faster?

Weight and performance benefits would point to a Yoshimura performance exhaust system (of course)...