

CHAMPION

SPEED's first AE86 is also one of the world's best

IT SEEMS that every issue there's a new benchmark. The F0400. The Z tune. The M3 CSL. The Z-track. More tech. More advanced. More tweaked and tuned, running enough re-mapping to confuse a boy scout with a compass. I love them, but without fail wonder how to turn on the radio without reaching for a 500-page manual.

Technology dazzles but does it make the car better? Traction control. Active yaw control. Active diffs. ABS brakes. Are we wrapping our selves in cotton wool and dampening the fun of driving purity? Where's the special something you don't get from a massive turbo-fed engine combined with nineteen inch chrome rims and on-board computer smarts made by some former NASA lab-coat wearer? Some of us like it far simpler.

The AE86 has that something. It's the combination of a simple 1.6-litre engine in a lightweight 930kg chassis that offers great handling balance. That's the key. Watch Beau Yates drift his silver AE86 and it's a sight to behold. Not taking anything away from his ability, but the car looks so damn comfortable when he snaps it sideways – like a great white shark snatching a fur seal.

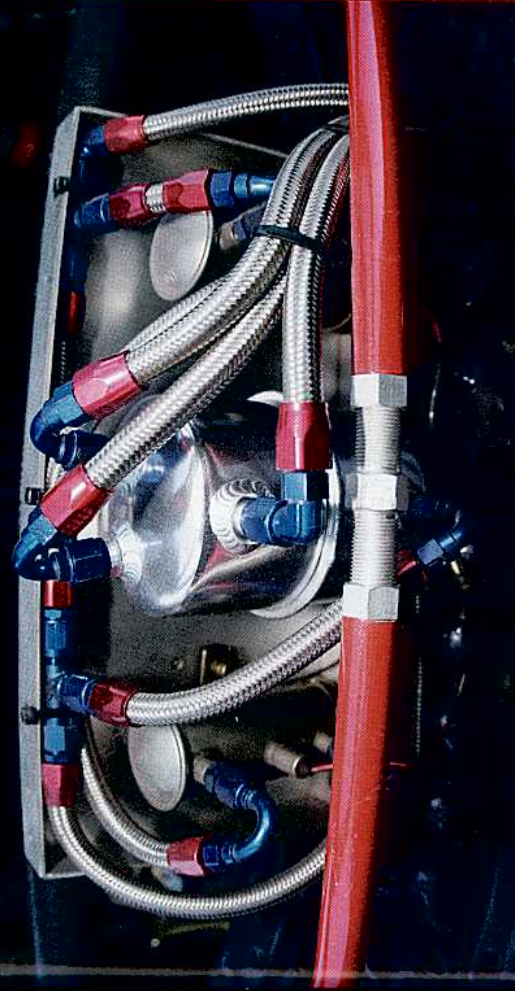
There has to be a model of AE86 purity, and SPEED's found it. This red beast is owned by D1 drift legend Koichi Yamashita, one of the main men in the JJC team. When he's not screaming sideways with Team Green, he's running an AE86 specialist shop called Running Free in the Kawanga district, fettling his fleet of hachi rokus. And this one's his best.

Although it's not the most powerful Trueno on the planet and doesn't showcase anything truly crazy, wild or cutting edge, Yamashita's scarlet rocket scores well enough in every facet of its performance to rate as the best we've ever seen.

It's finely honed and crafted, featuring a well thought-out list of modifications that work together to create a car which is tidy enough to show and quick enough to be an addictive driving experience.

Owning an AE86 shop has its advantages, especially when it come to working on your own car.

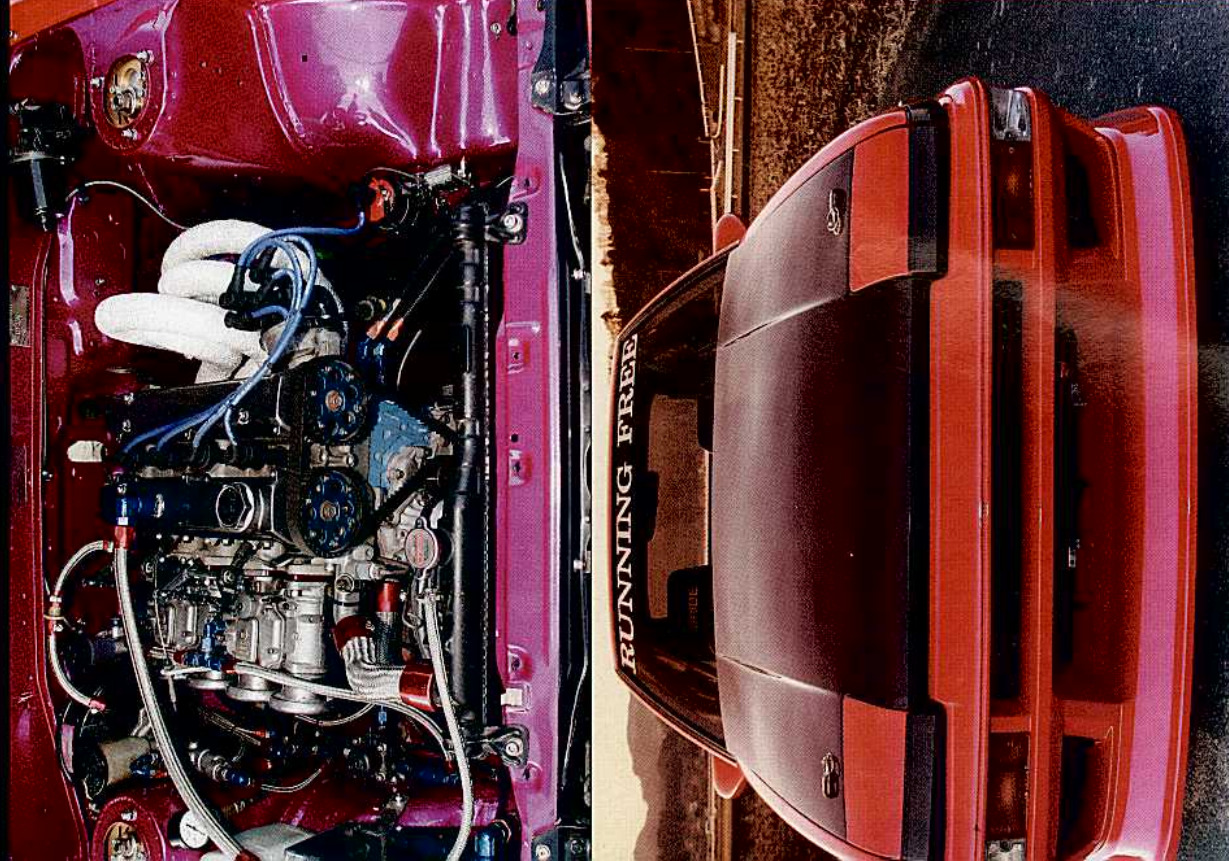
As with any drift car, there's more to do than just bolt in a set of brand-name coil-overs. On this car the undercarriage copped a major stiffening through Running Free control arms, rear cross bar, front ladder bar, floor support bar and G-One spot welding as well as



STORY ROBIN AUSTIN + PHOTOS ANTONIO ALVENDIA

Hot link
www.run-free.com

UNDER THE CARBON FIBRE BONNET BEATS THE BLACK HEART OF A STEROID-FED AE92-SERIES 4AG FOUR-CYLINDER



→ Specs

1986 AE86 Toyota sprinter

Owner: Koichi Yamashita

ENGINE

Motor: Toyota AE92 Kouki 1600cc DOHC in-line four-cylinder
Modifications: Mahle pistons, H-beam connecting rods, TRD 0.8mm head gasket, TRD 304/288 high lift cams, TRD Group A valves, TRD inner shim, TRD intake manifold, K-works exhaust manifold, Running Free all-stainless exhaust, Nismo electrical fuel pump, TRD oil pump, two-row aluminium radiator, Earls 34-row oil cooler.

DRIVETRAIN

Type: Five-speed manual, Ogura Racing Clutch super single clutch, TRD 4.1:1 LSD

SUSPENSION

Type: JIC coil-overs (all round), Running Free sway bars, Running Free control arms; custom mine-point roll cage, rear cross bar, front ladder bar, floor support bar, G-One spot welding
Brakes: FC3S RX-7 calipers (front), T+E-Zero 7/R rotors (rear), Earls SS braided lines
Wheels: Work Meister F 15x8.5-8 R 15x9-25 and 5mm spacer
Tyres: Advan Neova 195-50-15

EXTERIOR

Running Free Kouki bumpers, fenders, rear over-fender flares, sideskirts, fibreglass hatch with molded wing, carbon fibre bonnet, Expert Oz Aero mirror

0:05 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT KOICHI YAMASHITA

- 01 He makes Aero and suspension parts for Sprinters
- 02 Meguimbo is his favorite Udon restaurant
- 03 Curry Ramen is his favorite meal
- 04 They named the colour of his car after him; "Yama Red."
- 05 Shingo Murao races for his Run Free team



Below: AE86 looks beautiful without the sticker frenzy

a custom nine-point roll cage that ties the shell together forming a rigid frame for better drifts and more occupant safety.

The front and rear swaybars are from Running Free and work well with the JIC coil-overs while Work Meister 15-inch rims stretch the 195mm-wide Advan Neova rubber to the max. FC3S RX-7 calipers on the front and Running Free original rotors on the rear keep the tasty red hatch from sailing off into space on the really tight corners when Yama attacks the touge.

To keep the body from looking too bland, Koichi rummaged around in his store room and grabbed Running Free (can you see a theme developing here?) over-fender flares, a carbon fibre bonnet and a hatch with integral wing. It was all [bar the bonnet] covered in his own custom colour, dubbed 'Yama Red'. A sumptuous scarlet hue that complements the AE86's lines, it endows the legendary car with the classic drift look, although this example is finished to a standard most Sprinter drivers can only dream of.

Under the carbon fibre bonnet beats the black heart of a steroid-fed AE92-series 4AG four-cylinder. It's been filled with Mahle pistons, H-beam con rods and a TRD 0.8mm head gasket, while

the top-end of the rev-happy mill was stocked with monstrous TRD 304/288-degree high-lift cams and TRD Group A valves.

A TRD intake manifold, K-works exhaust manifold, Running Free all-stainless exhaust, two-row aluminium radiator and Earls 34-row oil cooler were also bolted on the outside. Stopping oil surge and starvation in high-G corners is the duty of a TRD oil pump, while the Nismo electrical fuel pump pours high octane brew into the hotter-than-hot 1600cc four-pot.

You can rest assured that this diminutive motor packs a screaming left-hook and has been detailed to the max. It sits in a sanitary engine bay that mixes race car engineering with show hall levels of refinement.

Backing up the 4AG is an Ogura Racing Clutch super single clutch and a TRD limited-slip differential that's filled with a 4.1:1 final drive ratio centre. They'll cop a hiding from Yama when he's at full-flight, but will keep coming back for more unlike the frail standard items.

Although to Joe Average these three-door Toyotas are fairly bland Corolla hatches made in the mid 80s, to the Initial D generation it's the AE86, the all-conquering Hachi-Roku. I think I want one.