

BILSTEIN
SHOCK ABSORBERS



A STYLE ALL HIS OWN

JUNCTION PRODUCE CEO TAKAHIRO TAKETOMI SPEAKS WITH MLE ABOUT HIS LEXUS LS460, HIS COMPANY AND THE VIP MOVEMENT

STORY AND PHOTOS DINO DALLE CARBONARE

We've seen the influx of VIP styling in the US over the last few years. But being such a new trend it is hard to fully understand, especially when there seem to be different interpretations developing. So we headed to Osaka to chat with Takahiro Taketomi, CEO of Junction Produce and the individual who, starting over 15 years ago, led the whole VIP movement.

When I arrived at the Junction Produce main offices I was shown to a private waiting room and told the boss would be along shortly. To be honest, I felt a little nervous to be meeting Taketomi-san as I waited, going over the questions I wanted to ask him in my head. As I flicked through the few Japanese VIP tuning magazines that

were on the coffee table I couldn't believe the number of Junction Produce cars, advertisements and articles about the boss himself. Not to mention the column he pens for one of the VIP-themed magazines.

The longer I waited the more nervous I became, as a car enthusiast living in Japan, meeting the father of the VIP movement is a pretty big deal. A few more minutes passed and it was time. I was taken into Taketomi's office where I would get just 10 minutes of his time. After exchanging pleasantries, including the obligatory business card swap and some chit chat, it soon became obvious that Taketomi is just a regular guy, with a very strong



**THE JUNCTION
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passion for what he has created, his very own tuning style!

While I had an appreciation for VIP Styling I asked Taketomi-san to run through as many details as he could on how he started the scene. And with enthusiasm, he rolled up his sleeves and began. "VIP styling or 'Bippu' [pronounced "bee-pu"] is a very simple tuning style," says Taketomi. "I say simple because real VIP applies only to a small number of large, luxury Japanese cars (Toyota Century, Crown, Crown Majesta, Celsior, Aristo, the Nissan Cima, Cedric/Gloria, Fuga and President); anything big and luxurious the domestic [read Japanese] market churns out."

So that's a good start, but what makes a car look VIP? "Authentic VIP styling calls for a black body color, large diameter wheels, lower suspension and a body-kit which helps make the car even lower by extending the bumpers and side skirts towards the road. Blacked out windows are a must too as are louder, big bore quad-pipes." As Taketomi goes on to explain, "when you drive a VIP car [in Japan] you



**JP BOSS
TAKAHIRO TAKETOMI**



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are looking for a reaction from people. You want onlookers to ask themselves how can that young kid afford such a big expensive car, and in this area of Japan if a young kid is seen driving an expensive VIP ride, most will assume he is part of the Yakuza [Japanese mafia]!”

Seeing this automatic link with organized crime groups and VIP sedans I decided to push my luck and ask Taketomi if he had ever been part of the Yakuza. “Before I set up Junction Produce I used to work in road construction,” he said. “I was a bad-ass and people were scared of me – especially when I cruised around with my crew. One night a scout working for the Yakuza approached me and told me they were looking for guys like me. But I stayed out of it and preferred to concentrate on setting up my new business.”

Over the last decade VIP styling has panned out and has been applied to a variety of different vehicles from minivans like the Honda Odyssey and Toyota Previa to compact cars like the Honda Fit and even to sport compact cars. But as Taketomi pointed out, “It isn’t the style that makes a VIP car, it’s the car itself.” He explained as well, that many different cars can be modified with a ‘Bippu’ look, but they are not true VIP rides.

The Junction Produce Sports Lexus LS460 is however a true example of VIP styling ... and the progression of that styling. And for that reason we had traveled to Osaka to not only see it, but to experience it in the epicenter of the VIP styling scene. You see, Osaka is a much different city than say, Tokyo. There are far less foreign influences and the overall population has a deep respect for their heritage, religion and history – not to mention a pride for

ADDED VALUE



While there are plenty of aftermarket parts available to spice up the LS460 into a true VIP car, much of the interest in the luxury sedan is because of all that it offers from the factory, including options such as:

- * Eight-speed automatic transmission
- * Mark Levinson 19-speaker sound system
- * Lexus Park Assist
- * 4.7-inch longer, extended wheelbase version
- * Rear DVD entertainment system with nine-inch LCD monitor
- * Air ride suspension
- * Reclining rear heated and air conditioned seats with massage function

**TAKAHIRO TAKETOMI
GOT THE WHOLE VIP
MOVEMENT STARTED
OVER 15 YEARS AGO.**





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SPECIFICATIONS/DETAILS

2007 LEXUS LS460

ENGINE

Lexus 4.6L V8

BODY, CHASSIS

Junction Produce six-piece Sports aero kit including front lip, side skirts, rear lip, trunk-lid spoiler, roof spoiler and hood spoiler plus Junction Produce Sports pillar reflector and Sports grille

WHEELS, TIRES

(f/r) Junction Produce 21x9-inch black polish Sports Heritage wheels with 255/30/21 Falken FK452 tires

SUSPENSION

Junction Produce air suspension controller

INTERIOR

Junction Produce Sports full wood interior including dash and center console, gauge surrounds, door handle surrounds, door control surrounds, vent surrounds, Kintsuna, white Fusa Kiku Knot

NUMBERS

Horsepower: 380 hp @ 6400 rpm
 Torque: 367 ft-lbs @ 4100 rpm
 Zero-60: 5.4 sec.
 Top Speed: 130 mph

anything made in Japan. It's this nationalistic pride, which dictates the choice for big Japan-made sedans. (Think of it as Japan's Mid-West).

Taketomi has taken the opportunity to launch a new styling concept with this LS460. The Junction Produce Sports lineup takes VIP into the new millennium by offering smoother and more modern lines. Lexus already does a great job designing their cars these days so Junction Produce concentrates in perfecting them with the addition of some subtle parts. The six-piece Sports kit is made up of a front lip spoiler, which brings that futuristic L-badged front end closer to the ground. Under the doors Junction Produce adds chunkier side skirts which feature a rounded off design and make them look like they are wrapping themselves under the car. The rear bumper lip is a very nice addition and highlights those very futuristic sunken-in exhaust outlets.

The idea was to keep things sleek and simple so only a few other additions were made like the small trunk lid lip spoiler, the small roof spoiler and the hood spoiler, which has the job of hiding the windshield wipers for a cleaner look. Every piece on this six-part kit is also available in carbon fiber for those wanting to give an even sportier feel to their cars. Mind you, this will push the price through the roof!

Keeping with the heavy use of chrome on the Lexus flagship, Junction Produce added a very eye-catching pillar reflector kit which makes the car look even more high-end. To keep the

TAKETOMI IS JUST A REGULAR GUY WITH A VERY STRONG PASSION FOR WHAT HE HAS CREATED, HIS VERY OWN TUNING STYLE!

big luxury sedan lying low is a Junction Produce suspension controller which allows the driver to modulate the ride height of the stock Lexus air suspension. This great little gadget means you don't have to worry about scratching that front bumper spoiler anywhere and when you're parked it allows you to drop the car right until the fenders and tires rub together.

Filling up the wheel wells, even when the suspension isn't dropped all the way, are a set of 21-inch Junction Produce Heritage wheels which feature a split rim design highlighted by a chrome and powder coated black contrasting paint scheme. Take a closer look inside those wheels and you might spot the factory Lexus calipers which have been painted black and finished off with the Junction Produce logo.

The interior modifications follow the same kind of idea as what was done on the exterior. Junction Produce added their full 13-part wood trim kit, which is made with the same type of wood as the original LS460 trim. Finishing off the VIP look is the gold Kintsuna and white Fusa which features a Kiku knot. Their job is to ward off evil spirits. These give an unmistakable Japanese feel to the type of tuning, exactly what a true Bippu tuned car should project. **MLB**