

The Toyota Celica and Supra in Touring Car Racing

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- This article intends to tell the story of both the Toyota Celica and Supra models in Touring Car racing, as proposed by me to site host Frank De Jong. The brunt of the information is based on the investigation by author Brian Long compiled in the book: "Celica & Supra: The book of Toyota Sports Coupés" (ISBN – 978-1904788133). As I do not intend to inflict copyright, most of the data here is as much summed up. I recommend the book to all petrol-heads, Toyota fans or not, by its insightful information and much pleasant writing, only at the reach of great motoring authors.

- The data on the Final part, of the Supra in the ETCC, is taken from a very clarifying discussion on the Ten Tenths Motorsport forum. My article is not and nor it pretends to be an intensive research on the subject as I have not much reliable sources in my hands, so I just put up what I've found out. A lot of the info such as results comes from De Jong's own site.

- Although not in production for some time, the Toyota Celica and Supra did wonders for the Japanese manufacturer sporting image, both in road and racing. Even if more associated nowadays to Rally (Celica) and GT Racing (Supra), both cars also made some mark in the Touring car scene. Here is my humble review of it all.

1st Generation Celica/A20;A35 (1970-77)



Ove Andersson in action with the Swiss ran Celica during the '73 Spa 24 hours

- Alongside the Mitsubishi Galant GTO and Datsun 240Z, the Toyota Celica was one of the cars that put Japanese car makers straight on the map of sporting vehicles. Seen for the first time at the September 1970 Tokyo Show, it didn't take long for both Toyota and privateers to see the potential of the powerful rear wheel drive coupé on a racetrack.

1971

- In November, Shioma Hosoya (Toyota's Test Driver) brought the Toyota Celica its first significant overall victory at the Japan All-Star event, at the Fuji race track. Hosoya was using a 1600 GT model, then the Japanese market top of the line car.

1972

- Seeing the Celica's potential for the track, Toyota marketed exclusively in Japan a stripped down version of the car, featuring less luxury items, the Celica GTV. It was not sold outside of their domestic market. Meanwhile, In the Race of Nippon, held at Fuji in April, Hiroyuki Kukitome and Kenichi Takeshita took first place in the 1600 GT Celica.

- In May, still at Fuji, Nobuhide Tachi won the Japan Grand Prix in a 1600 GT. Tachi later founded famed tuning company Tom's, who continues improving Toyota to this very day.

- Harakuni Takahashi and Kenichi Takes won the All Japan Suzuka 1000 Km race using a 1600 GT-R (not sold in road version, possible a race only "special"). Hiroyuki Kukitome won the Japan All Star race in Fuji.

- In July at the Nakayama track, a 1600 GT version driven by Nahoro Fujita was awarded first place in the Japan 2000 event. It was the last overall win by a Celica that year, but it also achieved several class wins.

- Meanwhile in Europe, rally ace Ove Andersson had founded the Toyota Team Europe team with backing from the parent company to contest rallying. This move was the first step on a way that gradually established Toyota's focus in making the motorsport Celica into rallying car instead of circuit racers.

1973

- The only overall win for the Celica came at the All Japan Fuji 1000 Km race, where two heavily modified Liftback Turbos took part (the Liftback body had debuted that year, sold alongside the Coupé). This particular model featured a huge front spoiler, making the car akin to a Ferrari Daytona, it's 1.6 Turbo engine boasting 300 hp and the car able to reach 270 Kmh. Several more standard cars were also entered. Painted green (ironically a colour associated to bad luck in Japan!), the number one Liftback Turbo (Harukini Takahashi/Kiyoshi Misaki) was first. The pairing of Tachi/Takeshita took third in a more standard Celica 1600 GT.

- Outside Japan, a Celica won the Macau Grand Prix, with Hong Kong driver Peter Chow at the wheel. More significantly, the Switzerland Toyota dealer started racing a Celica in the European Touring Car, with some notable results. Ove Andersson (yes, that one!) and Freddy Kotullinsky took class victory in Division one in two significant races: the 1973 Nurburgring 6 hours (6th overall) and at the Spa 24 Hours endurance race (9th overall).

1974

- The only overall race victories in Japan came from Junichi Isobe in his 1600 GT, when he won three races in the local touring championship all of them set at Fuji (set at March, April and September respectively), along with other good placing's.

- In Britain, the local dealer imported 200 GT models. Before that a near standard GT ran by John Markey' "Dealer Team Toyota" team joined the BSCC – British Saloon Car Championship - in Group 1 category. First tuned by Mathwall engineering, it's development was then took over by Arian Automotive (owned by Markley), with help from Toyota GB and famed tuner Broadspeed. Results were not outstanding, with a record lap at Oulton Park as his top showing.

1975

- After the low key start from last season, famed Datsun tuner Samuri took the Toyota mantle and prepared Celicas for the BSCC. Touring car legend Win Percy, who raced for them with a 240Z the previous year, came along in the change. A good start for the season saw a second car being raced by Rex Greenslade, with backing from Toyota GB. Greenslade was then replaced by Brian Cutting and Barrie Williams.

- In the 1975 RAC Tourist Trophy, Win Percy's engine blew and he teamed with Brian Cutting and Price Cobb to finish 5th overall and first in the 1600 cc class "by a country mile". In 10th overall and third in class was a third Celica GT, driven by F1 racer Harald Ertl and Hans Stuckenbrock. Their 1-3 finish gave Toyota the Team Prize.

- At the end of the season, Percy was champion in the 1600 class, having the same points as the other class (Div.2 and 3) winners, and winning 10 out of 11 times. Overall champion was Andy Rouse in a Triumph Dolomite.

- Meanwhile in the mainland, Toyota Switzerland ran a 2.0 GT on the ETCC Dutch round, at Zandvoort, with Manfred Schurti and Henny Hemmes at the wheel, that retired with steering issues. This particular is car worth mentioning as it was the only 2000 cc car to compete in the series alongside the BMW 2002, Ford Escort RS 2.0 and Triumph Dolomite. This model featured the 18R-G engine, with DOHC engine (designed with Yamaha input) and twin Solex carburettors, developing an impressive 145 bhp at 6400 rpm in his road version, when it was launched in 1973. To get an idea on the level of performance of this car, it was more powerful than the turbocharged BMW 2002 (130hp). This car later formed the basis of the Celica 2.0 Rally version used by TTE (now with 16 valves), who in 1973 took over from the 1.6 initially campaigned and in Gr.4 form it placed second overall in the prestigious 1977 RAC, producing by now some 240 hp, an hint of his potential in racing.

1976

- Win Percy again raced a Samuri prepared car for 1976. Samuri also tuned cars for Brian Cutting and Bill Sydenham. Barry Williams took over Sydenham when he lost his racing licence. Percy won his class nine times out of 10 races, but again lost the overall title (to Bernard Unett in a Chrysler Avenger). It was the last time the Samuri Celica's were run as a works supported team.

1977

- Future F1 star Martin Brundle, whose family had owned a Toyota dealership since 1973, bought the two ex-Samurai cars to race in the later part of 1976 and 77. While father Martin Sr. used his to go rallying, son Martin Jr. took it to his natural circuit environment. After some Super Saloon races to obtain an international license, at his first BSCC race, at Oulton Park, Brundle took pole. He ended the season with a win in Silverstone. Two years later, he moved to single-seaters. And that part of his career is very well known...

- Martin Brundle Sr, alongside his other son Robin, later raced a Celica 2000 GT for the 24 Hours of Snetterton.

- Despite already near obsolete on the stands, as the replacement model had already been announced in August, 1977 saw the appearance of the most radical racing Celica until then, the "Silhouette" Celica LB Turbo, built for the DRM, then Germany's Touring Car championship, and at least in looks, as radical as today's DTM.



The very muscled Schnitzer Celica Turbo, with Hans Heyer at the wheel

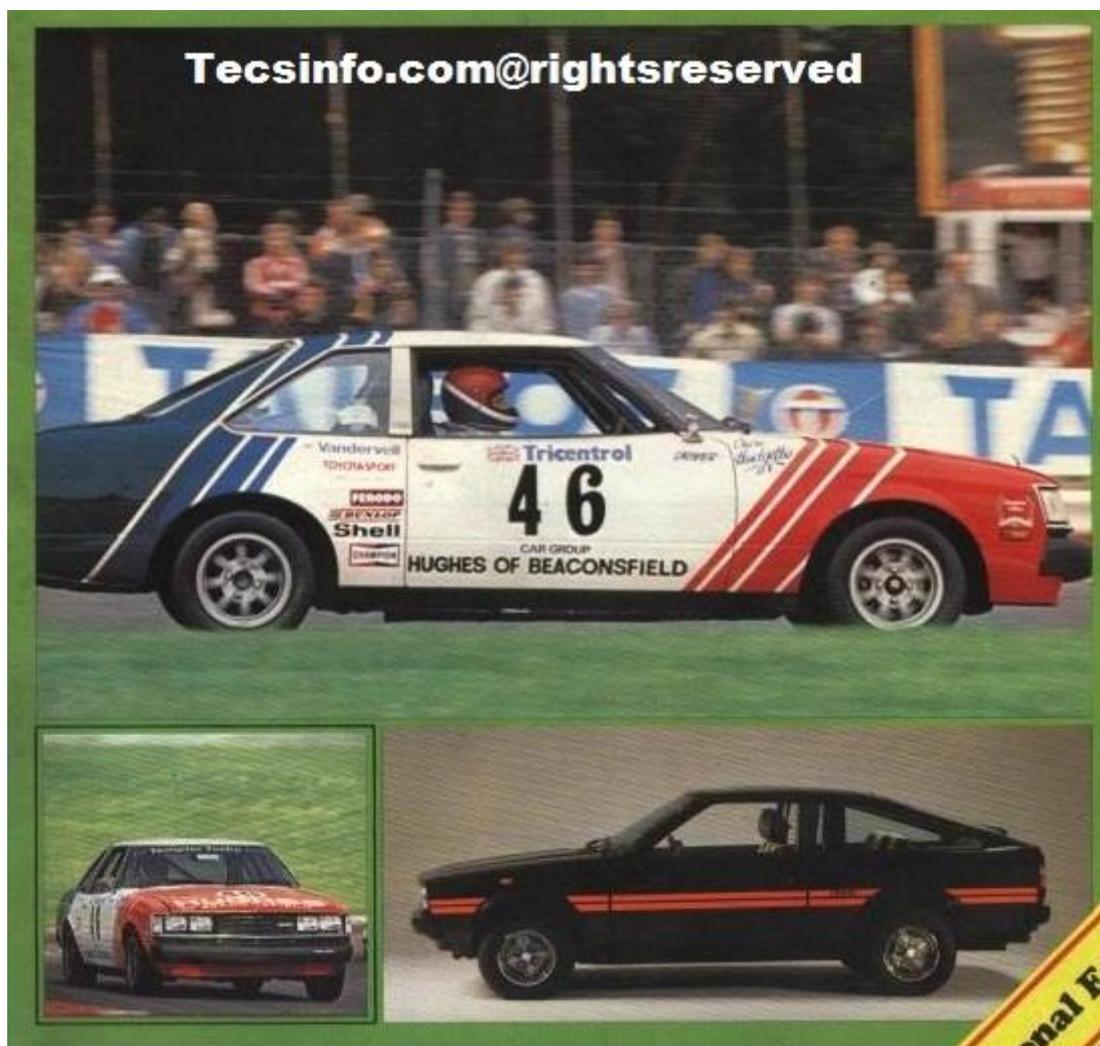
- Built by the prestigious Schnitzer tuning firm with backing from the German Toyota Dealer, it only retained the overall looks of the road version, with the huge aerodynamic aids making it like a Celica on steroids. Only the bonnet, roof, doors and rail panel were left original, according to the radical DRM Division 1 regulations. The engine had little in common too with the production model. Using the 2.0 GT engine as a basis, Schnitzer overbored it to 2.1, installed a custom 16V head, and more important, added fuel injection and a turbo-charger, with power rising to 560 bhp.

- With F1 ace Harald Ertl driving the Rodenstock liveried mobile, the car was quick but fragile, achieving 2 DNF, a fourth and it's only win in Zolder.

1978

- In 1978 Schnitzer lured reigning champion Rolf Stommelen from Gelo Porsche to drive the car, now painted in red and white, traditional Toyota colours. Ertl moved to BMW. The season proved out bad, amassing a string of retirements and only an 8th place to show. The car was sold to Japan, where it kept racing until 1982, continuing to pick retirements alongside good place finishes. One of the factors that helped this car gained fame despite his lack of wins was a popular scale model R/C car offered by Tamiya.

2nd Generation Celica/ A40;A50 (1977-1981)



Chris Hodgetts class winning Celica on the cover of British Magazine Motormail

1978

- Win Percy campaigned new Celicas in 1978 and 79, but without managing the same results as with the previous model. Percy moved to Mazda in 1980 where he took two straight titles.

Percy returned to Toyota in 1982 but with a Corolla, as the Celica, as mentioned early, was specializing itself in the rallying field.

1979

- In Japan there were still some class and overall wins for the Celica. One of the most impressive was at the Fuji Inter 200 Super Silhouette Race, where Nobuhide Tachi took first place. Further proof that the Celica was moving to the dirt rally stages was that the 2nd Generation Celica's stripped down version (again exclusive to Japanese Domestic Market) was now christened "GT-Rally" instead of GTV.

1980/81

- Chris Hodgetts took two 1600 titles in 1980/81 with a Celica Coupé. He actually used the Ex-Percy Celica converted to Group I regulations, along with a cosmetic update (headlights and grill had been re-styled). After losing his drive, Hodgetts contacted Hughes of Beaconsfield, Percy's team boss, on the same day Percy had resigned. In 1981 he managed second overall behind Percy's Mazda. Hodgetts later managed the BTCC title in 1986/7 with the Corolla GT AE86.

1981

- In the states, Veteran George Follmer, of Can Am and F1 fame, raced at the IMSA endurance series with a Celica, entered at the GTU class, which featured GT cars up to 2.5 litre engines. The model featured a 250 bhp 2.0 engine and achieved a 7th place in Portland as it's best result.

3rd Generation Celica/A60 (1981-1985)



The IMSA Celica ran by Dan Gurney's AAR team.

1982

- Although absent from the European traditional touring car scene, the 3rd generation Celica started taking part in the United States IMSA series on the GTU class and after that the GTO class that replaced it. It featured a space frame with a 2.1 turbo engine, and similarly to the European Silhouette Formulas, retained some body parts similar to the road car for commercial reasons. After a slow start with Kent racing in 82, former F1 team owner and driver Dan Gurney All American Racing (AAR) Team took over the project for 83 and slowly took the cars up to the front places. This operation continued until the 4th generation Celica, after that it was replaced by a full blown prototype GTP car.

2nd Generation Celica Supra/A60 (1981-1986)



Barry Sheene's Toyota Supra with his trademark seven on the door

- It is important to note that the first Supra models (1978-81) were branded as a sort of upper Gran Touring version of the Celica. Although sharing the designation "Celica", they were completely different models, being bigger cars with larger engines. These cars were only sold in Japan (as the Celica XX) and in the US and UK as the Celica Supra. As big and heavy GT models, they were not suitable for racing. But the second generation model had some place in the Group A rules instated by FIA for 1982 onwards.

1984/5

- After taking the 1982 title with a Corolla, Percy moved to the Supra in 1983. On a development year, his best placing was an outright win in Brands Hatch. In 1984, Percy ran a

2.8 litre 2800 GT top of the line in the BSCC. Once again sponsored by Hughes of Beaconsfield, he took the title after a season long battle against Andy Rouse's big Rover Vitesse. It was his third and final BSCC title.

1985

- Percy moved to the ETCC with TWR Rover and recently retired Bike Racing star Barry Sheene took over Rouse's seat (literally, as the car was the same!) for 1985. The two times GP 500 champion, carrying his trademark number 7, always proved popular and generated a lot of advertisement for the team but results were understandably far from the last year's title. His best placing's where two double podiums in Thruxton and Silverstone, ending the season 16th overall.

- As a side note, a bit ironically since the Celica was by now firmly established as Toyota's Rally weapon, Swedish rally ace Per Eklund, took a Celica Supra to the 1985 Group A British Rally title. By now, with the Group B craze at its height, Toyota was using the Celica Twin Cam Turbo with some success in the WRC, winning the African marathons of Safari and Ivory Coast that season. Only a single example of this rare Celica Supra rally car was built in England.

1st Generation Supra/A70 (1986-1992)



One of the two RAS Supra entered at the 87' Spa 24 Hours tackles Eau Rouge

- The first Supra "only" model debuted in 1986, now without any name variation between markets. It's RWD and powerful engines seemed natural to circuit racing, as did the first generations Celica. On the other hand, the 5th generation Celica (1986-1991), was now completely onto rallying. With the end of Group B, the Celica was in the right place to become Toyota's rally weapon onto the Group A era, with engine, transmission (4WD) and handling

characteristics all maximized to the rallying scene. At this stage Toyota was looking at no expenses on their bid for the World Rally Title, fully backing TTE and setting the basis for their successes of the 1990s. With the lighter Corolla firmly established as pace setter in the Division 1 (up to 1600cm³) Class of Touring Cars all over the world, it was up for the Supra to get those overall race wins.

1987

- Most of the Japanese car builders did not enter full factory or works backed teams at the European Touring Car championship like Ford or BMW did, instead focusing their efforts on their local series, the popular JTCC – Japan Touring Car Championship. Most of these cars, such as the Division I Spoon and Mugen prepared full-blown Honda Civic's, or the countless JDM only variations of the Toyota Corolla, were seldom raced outside Japan, one of the exceptions the Guia Macau race. Nissan was the exception with their single Skyline program in the ETCC, but only in 1988, with the series axed at the end of that same year.

- Toyota's program was no exception; they first raced the JTCC Supra in late 1987, through the works backed Tom's and Sard Team. These cars were powered by the top spec 3.0 6 in line cylinder DOHC 24V turbo engine, featuring a lowered compression ratio but increased turbo pressure, reaching 290 hp, 60 over the road car. Gear ratios were naturally changed, and braking was now handled by Lockheed top of the line disc brakes and 17" magnesium wheels. Titanium and carbon fibre were used in certain places to chop weight. In total, 11 cars were prepared. 1980 F1 champion Alan Jones was at the wheel of one of the Tom's Car and he managed a stunning debut winning first time out in Sugo.

- Meanwhile in the ETCC, despite Toyota's lack of interest (and support), two teams took the chance to prepare the Supra, and curiously, took two different approaches. Famed Belgium Tuner RAS used the Japanese example and prepared the Supra 3.0 Turbo. But the lesser known Swiss Bemani Motorenbau outfit, which had a history preparing Division I Corolla's in European and National Series, turned to a 3.0i Normally Aspirated (N/A) version.

- RAS, who ran the reigning champion Volvos in 1986, turned to the Toyota when the Swedish manufacturer jumped ship at the end of the season. Their star driver was touring car legend Hans Heyer, with European and DRM titles in the bag, having been a front-runner since the 1970s. His team-mates (in those days, they varied a lot from race to race) included DTM aces Frank Jelinski and Volker Strycek, veteran Enzo Calderari and Swede Anders Olofson.

- Despite looking the part in their stunning red and white Bastos livery, the RAS Supra did not had much to write home about. The cars first raced on the fourth round, at Zolder, development having been delayed. Much different from their Asian debut, their first outing was a tragedy. The two cars entered failed to qualify, and to rub salt on the wound, they were outpaced by the 1.6 Corollas racing in Division 1.

- The team skipped Zeltweg, and the single car split between Heyer and Belgium Eddy Joosen was a non-finisher in the finale at Nogaro. Incidentally it was here that the Bemani team took the Supra's top placing of the season with a sixth, also their first finish of the year. Drivers in the occasion were Phillipe Müller and Jo Zeller, both Swiss.

- Both RAS and Bemani also contested the short lived first iteration of the WTCC, ran in parallel to the European series. In their first outing in the German round, at the Nürburgring, the three cars entered by both teams DNQ. The two squads skipped the Brno round and RAS entered a single car at Spa and Silverstone, failing to finish both races. None of the teams bother to attend the fly-away rounds at Asia-Pacific, since as they hadn't paid the 60.000 dollars entry fee for the world series, couldn't score manufacturer points or even earn start line money. A privateer Supra raced by a Peter Williamson team contested the Bathurst 1000, not reaching the end of that crazy race.

- The top place by a Supra on WTCC was a 9th place in the Japanese Fuji round by local team Tom's. JTCC regulars Geoff Lees and Kaoro Hoshino where at the wheel in the occasion.

- The problems faced by the Supra on track (as the road car was a success) could be traced to a variety of reasons. The car's big dimensions, more akin to a GT car, (4.6 meters in length and 1.7 wide) didn't help it's agility on circuit, especially compared to the nimble BMW M3, still today, more than 25 years old, a reference in road holding. The days of the big Jaguar and 635 CSi winning titles where long gone by now, making their way to more neat, compact racers.

- A big and heavy car might be able to keep up with lighter rivals if he has the power to do it, but it was not the case with the Toyota. The RAS Turbo Supra achieved 370hp, nearly 100 hp down on the front-running Sierras, problems similar to the ones encountered by the JTCC teams, who also had a tough time trying to keep pace with the Ford.

- Another big problem was weight. The regulations stipulated that a minimum weight should be calculated according to the car's displacement, with Turbo cars having an added penalty. In the Supra case, it featured a significantly larger weight penalty than its rivals (the M3 used a 2.3 atmospheric unit and the Sierra a 2.0 turbo). Speaking in numbers the works BMW weighed 960 kilos and a Ford was on the 1100, while the Toyota Supra had to weight, at least, 1325 kg. The Bemani team's car, as a N/A car, could weigh a whole less 1035 Kg, but had a great horsepower deficit compared to the turbos.

- Although development testing (and money) could improve the car's performance, it must be reminded again that by now Toyota's major sporting focus was the WRC and some WSC activities as well, and also that the RAS Supra effort did not feature any major backing of the manufacturer and as such was a low priority for the Japanese brand.

1988



The Bemani Supra getting it sideways during the Tourist Trophy

- Group A regulations allowed that besides the original minimum 2500 units to gain homologation, the production of a second batch of 500 evolution models be built, that in Toyota's case, could help the Supra to become lighter. So in 1988 Toyota launched the JDM exclusive Supra Turbo A (also known by his model codename MA70), which was 10 kgs lighter than the standard Turbo Supra. As usual in these "Evolution Models", manufacturers took the chance to add other improvements: there were modifications on the turbocharging system, now reaching 270hp in road trim, 40 over the standard Turbo. The suspension was reworked, as did the Limited Slip Differential. Other changes where bigger tires and rims.

- The exterior was also modified, with a slightly revised front to improve cooling, with exclusive paintwork and interior details such as a special Momo steering wheel. The car started racing in Japan by the Autumn of 1988, and apparently raced in Europe through the Tom's cars contesting the Spa 24 hours in 1989 and 90. None of them managed to cross the finish the race, all out with mechanical gremlins.

- Back to 1988, RAS turned to BMW and Bemani took the mantle of the Supra challenge. The line-up featured nearly ten different drivers, with the more known being Phillipe Müller, Enzo Calderari and Volker Strycek. On some occasions two cars where entered, and when they lasted the races, they achieved solid results. Race by race, the team took a fine fifth in Race 1 at Monza, DNF at Donington, Estoril and Jarama and scored with 6th in Dijon and 8th in Vallelunga. They again retired at Germany but bounced back with a fine fifth at the prestigious Spa 24 hour and backed this it with a season best 4th at the Belgium Zolder round. At Silverstone they finished eight and where fifth by the third time at the Nogaro finale.

- A mention must also be made to the MIL Motorsport effort, who ran a Supra Turbo in the BTCC during the season. Champion Chris Hodgetts was at the wheel of the #1 car, alongside Mark Hales and Ian Flux, with Vic Lee in charge of the second car. Results were poor with Hodgetts conceding the title to Andy Rouse, with a third on the penultimate race as his best result and only score of the season, the Supra not returning for 1989.

1989

- With the ETCC axed by FIA, Bemani moved with the Supra to DTM in 1989, which used a set of more liberal Group A rules. With the turbocharged cars ballasted and known to be banned for 1991 onwards, Bemani's N/A Supra seemed a good fit, now producing some 340 hp, on par with its rivals. The different rules also allowed the car to shave a lot of weight, now setting the scale on 1120 kgs. But with no factory support, results were always hard to come by, having to make do competing with privateer BMW and Mercedes. Phillip Muller ended the season 22nd overall with a 10th as his best showing.

- On the other hand, at least at home the Bemani Supra achieved success in the lesser known Swiss touring car series, taking 3 wins en route to the 1989 title and racking class wins up to 1993.

1990

- In DTM, the Bemani team only started three races in 1990, with two DNF's and a 17th, pulling out of the series altogether at the end of the year.

- Back in the JTCC, the Supra's weren't tasting much champagne. In general the field had much difficulty contending with the new Nissan Skyline GT-R R32 "Godzilla", perhaps the ultimate Group A touring car, equipped with a powerful 2.6 turbo engine and 4WD, all biased towards road racing. If the previous FR Turbo Skyline was at occasions a match for the European cars, its successor blitzed them, and taking over from the BMW's and Ford as the pace setter. It was the start of a winning streak that only ended in 1994 when the JTCC changed to saloon cars, essentially outlawing the Skyline. Other example from the Skyline domination was that it was also banned from the Australian series after three straight titles.

- Fighting for the World Rally Championship titles and heavily involved in a WSC program, the Supra development, taking in account its poor results, must have been given a low priority. Confusion about the Group A regulations, with literally every country adopting their own interpretation, mustn't have helped the urge to solve the problems, as the road car was being a success. As an example, Toyota GB sold over 12.000 Supras, nearly half of Europe's three litre cars. Other manufacturers stayed in the same boat concerning new Touring Cars, with models such as the Sierra racing well after their production had ended.

- So In 1991, Toyota switched to the Corolla in their JTCC effort, with some Supras soldiering on with privateers. Toyota later re-muscled their worldwide touring car effort, along with a bunch of manufacturers in the Super Touring craze of the 90s, using the four door saloon Carina. The Supra was later basis for a successful Super GT campaign both home and abroad.