

Duce returned in 1964 with the 'Moonbeam' Devin-bodied Sports Car, alongside a star-studded entourage of American racers, including 'T.V' Tommy Ivo, Don Garlits, Sox & Martin, KS Pittman, Tony Nancy and Bob Keith with the Arnold Chaves blown, injected and stroked 400ci Chevrolet powered Dos Palmas dragster.

60 years later, for the diamond anniversary of the first British Drag Fest the spectators at Dragstalgia 2024 were once again able to witness historic dragsters that were present in these burgeoning years of British drag racing. The Allard Chrysler, on loan from the National Motor Museum, along with the Dos Palmas rail and Mooneyes' own faithful replica of the original Dragmaster machine would all be present for the enthusiastic masses.

When we first saw that Shige Suganuma, Chico Kadama, and the rest of the Mooneyes crew were making the journey to Santa Pod Raceway from California and Japan, it soon became the most hotly anticipated spectacle of the 2024 drag racing season, not in the least as we hoped they may bring some LA weather in their suitcases. They did bring their Bonneville salt flat whites, but alas, not the weather, as we battled with downpours all weekend.

This didn't stop Mooneyes and Dos Palmas from doing cackling fire ups in the pits, as well as exhibition displays on track. The last of these became viral pretty quickly, as Shige piloted the Mooneyes dragster to a pirouetting spin across the width of the track. When I asked Shige about this, he said "the only thing I can say is 'it's just the damned driver!' But, it was okay - I didn't hit anything, it stayed in one piece. My bad!" But Shige needn't apologise; the crowd were enthralled. Mooneyes came to put on a show, and put on a show they did.

Shige also told me a little bit about his history and how he came to be involved with the iconic brand. "Well, I grew up in Japan" Shige starts, "Back in the 1960s and '70s in Japan, there was a lot of information about the racing scene in Europe and the USA making its way to Japan; Formula One, Le Mans, Can Am, drag racing and so on. When I was in my teens, I got a chopper, then later changed to a hot rod."

Shige was hooked, and these formative years growing up under the influence of the crazy car media coming from the States was to become a pivotal step in his life and future career as a Mooneyes dealer. "I met Dean Moon for the first time in 1983. I visited his speed shop in California to purchase 2 sets of MOON Discs: one set for me, which I brought back to Japan for my Toyota Mini Truck, and one for my brother-in-law. My friends started to ask me 'how can I get my own MOON discs?' So, I called Moon and asked him to send me 12 more sets to Japan".

The demand took off, and Shige soon found himself importing wheel trims for the coolest of Japanese hot rodders and custom car builders. "I didn't even think that it could end up being my business at that time. A few weeks later I was washing my Toyota in the yard on my day off. My wife called out to me 'hey Shige, you have an international call from the USA!' I picked up the phone, and it was Dean Moon! He said 'hey Shige, I'll give you a good deal, why don't you purchase another 24 sets of MOON Discs?' I was so happy to get a call from him, so I didn't even think before automatically responding... my answer was 'Yes, Sir!'"

Shige ran into a problem though. There was no one to sell these 24 sets of imported discs to, as everyone who was anyone had already bought a set off of him! "This is how I started this business. I had to sell 24 sets of MOON Discs with no destination." This didn't phase Shige. "I opened my shop called 'MOONEYES' in Yokohama, Japan in May of 1986."

Dean Moon passed away on the 4th June 1987, leaving his speed parts empire to his wife. Moon Speed Equipment had grown from throttle linkages, fuel blocks, and the quirky foot-shaped throttle pedals, into one of the most important aftermarket speed accessories companies of the 20th century. After Moon's wife passed away in 1990, a predicament faced Shige Suganuma.

"Moon Equipment Company was put up for sale by his family. At the same time, I had my Mooneyes business in Japan which was slowly growing. So, if some other company took over Moon in the USA, what would happen to my business? I had no choice. The only way I could continue my business was to purchase Moon Equipment Company! After a long negotiation, I reopened the shop in August 1992."

Preserving Moon's legacy for future generations of hot rodders was an important factor of taking over Moon to Shige and friend, Chico Kodama. Shige fought the changing world, and even city planners, to keep everything exactly how Moon had built it. He even paid the phone bill in the interim of Moon's passing and Shige taking over to keep the same phone number.

"We tried to keep desks, chairs, shelves, machines, tooling, the building and everything. Even, papers, pictures, files and so on". Stepping into the Santa Fe shop is like a trip back in time. "If you have a chance to come to our shop in California, you can smell what a speed shop smelt like in the '60s" Shige quipped, in an inviting proposition.

Mooneyes is famed for having such an iconic logo (reportedly reimagined by a Disney cartoonist in the mid '50s), and even dating back to the 1950s and '60s it could be said that branding was a pivotal part of Moon's marketing.



MOON U.S. Drag Team, Dragstalgia, Santa Pod, Friday 5th July 2024

L-R Emi Suganuma, Dale Snoke, Shige Suganuma, Travis Capps, Chico Kodama and Emily Sherer