Toyota Racing Driver Ken Gushi On His Love of Drift

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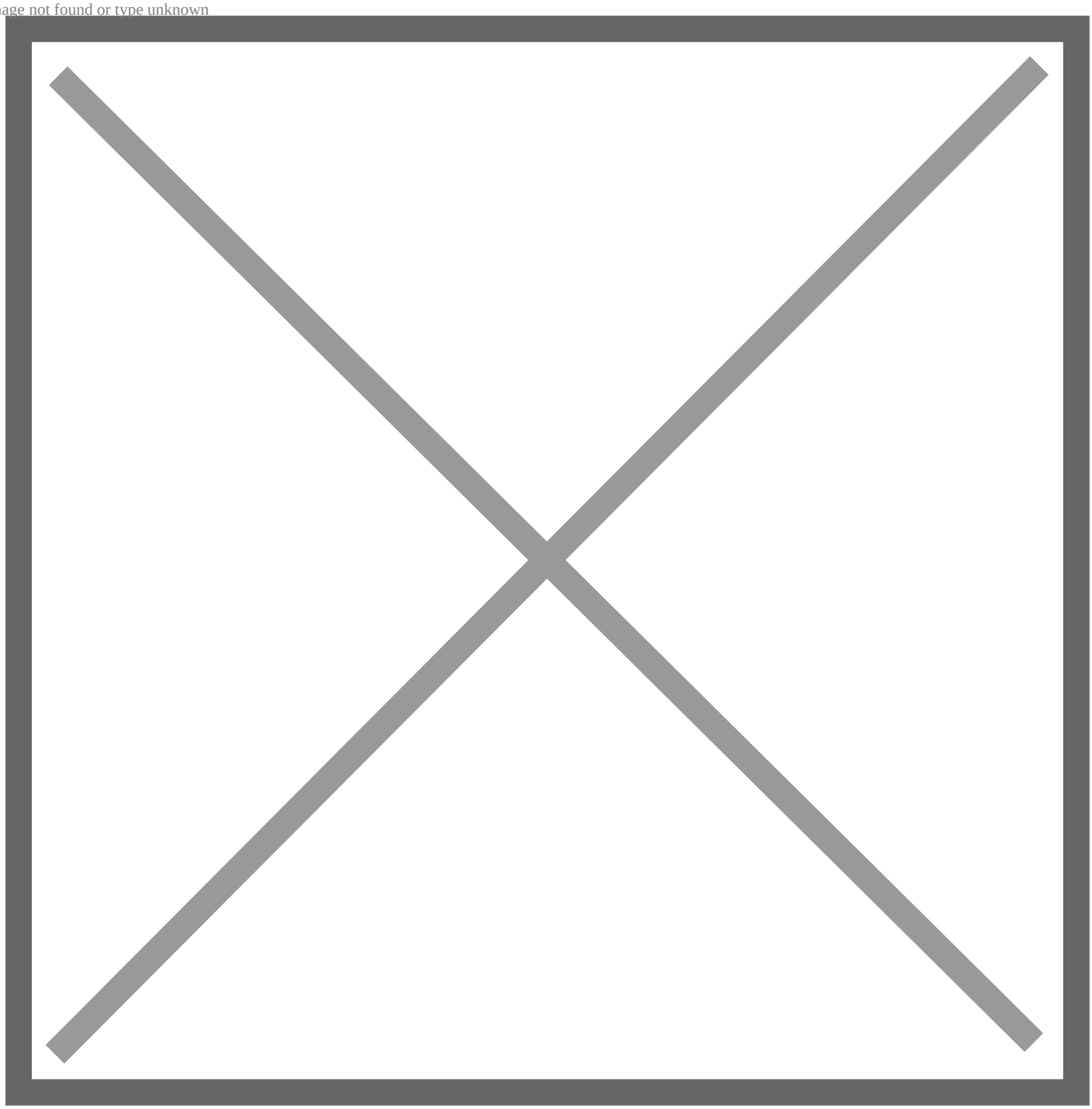


Team Toyota driver Ken Gushi is practically synonymous with Formula Drift: For as long as the series has been running stateside, Gushi's been behind the wheel — usually in a Toyota.

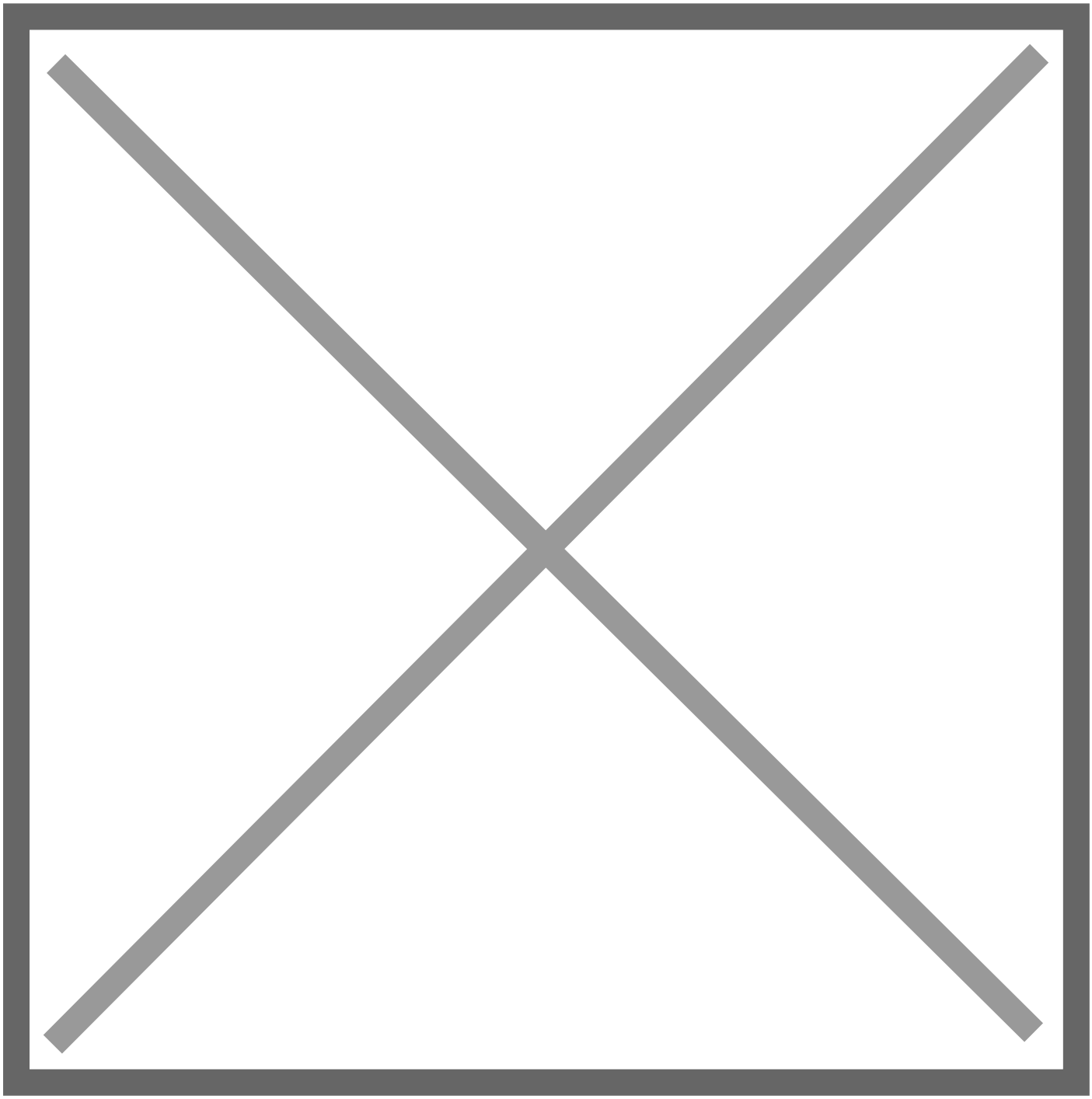
"Having a partner like Toyota is an absolute dream come true," Gushi says. "I grew up watching my father race the AE86 Corolla, and we've always had Toyota cars in our driveways. To be able to tell my story of being a Toyota athlete — even after 15 years — still feels good."

One of the earliest drivers on the U.S. scene, the Japanese-born racer now lives in Southern California and competes in Formula Drift in a Toyota GR Supra. A second-generation drift fanatic, Gushi learned to drive in his father's Toyota AE86 when he was just 13 years old.

"I come from a family that moved from Okinawa, Japan, with barely any money," he says. "At the age of 16, I became the youngest competitor in D1 Grand Prix and Formula Drift championships. I believe there is no such thing as a dream too big!"

Racing with Toyota for more than a decade, Gushi has become one of the most recognizable drifters, playing an important role in the growth of the sport.

"The success I've had comes from all the support I've gotten from across the globe," says Gushi. "The support from the fans of the sport and from the staff, including team members. I'd like to thank everyone who has been a part of my journey."



Ken Gushi, Moty’s / Three’s Racing Toyota GR86

The Drift Difference

In a drift race, drivers navigate their cars through a marked course while intentionally maneuvering into controlled sideways slides at high speeds. Unlike other motorsports where it’s a race against the clock, drift is judged on execution and style.

At a Formula Drift event, drivers compete in a single-elimination bracket of tandem battles. When drivers qualify for the Formula Drift Championship, they are ranked and positioned into a bracket, which determines the competition pairs. Drivers compete against one another one-on-one, judged on their ability to complete the course while maintaining a high degree of angle and how the vehicle “behaves” in terms of fluidity and forward momentum.

While the sport has roots in Japan, Formula Drift is the first official series in North America, founded in 2003. Gushi has been drifting for more than 17 seasons — since the sport’s earliest days in the United States. The racing veteran started his professional career in 2004, driving in the first-ever Formula Drift Championship in the U.S.

“For me, drifting is not work,” Gushi says. “It’s a hobby that I kind of just get paid to do.”

A Series Leader

Today, Gushi has produced multiple top-three finishes in the Formula Pro Championship standings.

“My first win was back in 2005,” he says. “I remember feeling accomplished and ecstatic about being on the top step of the podium.”

In 2019, his first season as owner-driver for Ken Gushi Motorsports, he finished 11th in the final standings and picked up his first victory since 2005 in the series finale at Irwindale Speedway. Gushi’s most recent win was in Salt Lake City in 2022.

At Irwindale, the champion drifter started in his Toyota 86 from a season-best second position, and after a bye in the first round, he took on a few series regulars to move on to the Final Four. Gushi had a tough battle in the final series but ultimately came out victorious at the “House of Drift.”

“My most recent win at the series finals tops any win I’ve had in my career,” Gushi says. “Irwindale Speedway is my home track, and to win in front of my home crowd was truly an experience I will never forget. I was so happy that I cried.”