

Yamaha Motor Monthly Newsletter

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The cloisonné Tuning Fork Mark emblem on Yamaha Motor's first product, the YA-1 (1955)

The Core of Yamaha Motor

The Yamaha Brand

Part 1: Its Origins and the Three Tuning Forks

Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd. was founded on July 1, 1955 to make the motorcycle business of Nippon Gakki Co., Ltd. (presently Yamaha Corporation) an independent company. With its corporate mission of becoming a *Kando Creating Company, Yamaha Motor grew under the leadership of founding president Genichi Kawakami, inheriting both the tangible and intangible corporate assets of Nippon Gakki as its DNA. In 2015, Yamaha Motor celebrates its 60th anniversary.**

In this month's issue, we wind back the clock to the era of Yamaha Motor's parent company, Nippon Gakki, and introduce the birth and history of the Yamaha brand.

**Kando* is a Japanese word for the simultaneous feelings of deep satisfaction and intense excitement that we experience when we encounter something of exceptional value.

Torakusu Yamaha's First Encounter with an Organ

In July 1887, Japan was in the midst of a new blossoming of culture and modernization under the new Meiji government after nearly 300 years of closed borders under the isolationist policy of the old Edo regime. A small crisis had befallen Jinjo Elementary School in the city of Hamamatsu in Shizuoka Prefecture; the school's built-in reed organ had broken down. At the time, all organs in Japan were expensive, foreign-made instruments costing more than a civil servant's annual wage. The troubled school officials asked an engineer who happened to be in Hamamatsu at the time repairing medical equipment at a hospital was asked if he could try to repair the organ. His name was Torakusu Yamaha, the father of the Yamaha brand. Born in 1851 as the son of a samurai family that served the feudal lords of the Kishu region (today's Wakayama Prefecture) as astronomers, Torakusu grew up surrounded by the instruments used in astronomical measurements. From this upbringing, and being dexterous of hand, Torakusu learned the skills of watchmaking and how to handle and repair medical equipment after the Meiji Restoration ended Japan's feudal period and opened the country to foreign technology.



Torakusu Yamaha, the first president of Nippon Gakki Co., Ltd.

Examining a broken organ for first time at the school's request, Torakusu identified some damaged springs as the cause and was able to repair it with little trouble. In the process, however, he had become fascinated with the mechanisms of this "sound-producing box" he was seeing for the first time. This experience inspired him to try building one himself.

The Tremendous Challenge of Instrument Tuning

Torakusu was an independent technician with no workshop or financing. But with the financial support of the president of the Hamamatsu hospital where he had been working and the cooperation of a skilled metalworker he had met in Hamamatsu, he was soon completely absorbed in his challenge to build an organ, carefully handcrafting many of the parts himself, one by one. Within two months, his first organ was complete.

However, the reception his organ got as a musical instrument was far from favorable, to say the least. After considerable thought, Torakusu decided to take it to a respected music school in Tokyo for a professional evaluation. Since there was no railway yet connecting Hamamatsu and Tokyo, he and one of his fellow engineers slung the organ on a shoulder pole and carried it the entire 250 km to Tokyo, traversing the steep mountain roads of Hakone on the way.

At the end of this arduous journey, the evaluation Torakusu's organ got at the Tokyo music school was that his creation was poorly tuned and thus unusable as a musical instrument. Musical instrument tuning was completely unknown territory for Torakusu and presented an entirely new challenge, but undaunted, he received special permission to sit in on a course in tuning and devoted himself to a month of intense study and training. After returning to Hamamatsu, Torakusu immediately set to work on building his second organ, and by the end of the year he was back at the music school in Tokyo with it. Only this time, the result was different; his new organ was highly praised as one that could serve well in place of foreign-made organs. It had been less than six months since Torakusu had first seen an organ at Jinjo Elementary School.



Torakusu's brave trek across the mountains of Hakone with his first organ on a carrying pole was later immortalized in this bas-relief

From Yamaha Organ Manufacturing Co. to Nippon Gakki Co., Ltd.

It was in March 1888 that Torakusu Yamaha gathered together furniture builders, carpenters, spring makers and other craftspeople to start full-fledged production of organs. A year later in 1889, he established Yamaha Organ Manufacturing Company as a joint-stock company.

After business had grown to the point that the organs were also being exported to Southeast Asia, the company was reborn as Nippon Gakki Co., Ltd. in 1897. From 1900, the company began manufacturing and selling pianos under the Yamaha brand name. Later, in 1916, Torakusu would pass away at the age of 64. The vice president at the time took over management of the company, only to encounter a series of crises, including a fire at the factory, the Great Kanto Earthquake and a major labor dispute, and Nippon Gakki was on the verge of collapse. The man who was brought in to attempt to put the company back on its feet was a local Hamamatsu man named Kaichi Kawakami. As the third president of the company, he initiated a program of reforms based on seven policies that included the enforcement of official discipline, fairness and re-organization of personnel affairs, rationalization of working methods and organization and systemization of management. These reforms proved successful in turning the company around, and despite the further trials of the Second World War, he was able to keep the company afloat until he passed its presidency over to his son, Genichi Kawakami.

The Values behind the Three Tuning Forks

Shortly after establishing Nippon Gakki, founding president Torakusu Yamaha decided to use a tuning fork as its corporate mark in 1898, with "a design featuring a Chinese phoenix* holding a tuning fork in its mouth" as the trademark. The tuning fork was a symbol of the great efforts he had made to learn about musical instrument tuning in order to improve his first organ that eventually led to the company's founding. The choice of the design with three tuning forks was meant to symbolize the close cooperation between the company's three departments of technology, manufacturing and marketing, and the robust vitality behind its efforts to spread sound and music throughout the world. The three tuning forks also express the integration of the three essential musical elements of melody, harmony and rhythm.

*This bird of Chinese mythology is said to herald the birth of an Emperor possessing saintly virtues.



A Chinese phoenix holding a tuning fork in its mouth was made the company trademark in 1898, one year after Nippon Gakki was established. The mark was known for being used on top quality organs, which illustrates how the company's founder always aimed to create world-class products

Employees that Become the Company's Strength

Under the new leadership of Genichi Kawakami, Nippon Gakki's new motorcycle business was separated and established as an independent company, Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd. In addition to taking on the same Yamaha brand name, the three tuning forks were also inherited from the parent company as the new company's symbol mark, but slightly changed with the addition of a circular outer band encasing the three tuning forks to make the mark resemble a motorcycle wheel. As with the mark of Nippon Gakki, the three tuning forks also represent for Yamaha Motor the same corporate aim to "venture boldly onto the world stage with a strong union of Manufacturing, Marketing and Technology." And today, the three tuning forks also represent the three Yamaha Motor management principles of "Creating value that surpasses customer expectations," "Establishing a corporate environment that fosters self-esteem" and "Fulfilling social responsibilities globally." These principles are based on the

management philosophy of Kaichi Kawakami. The company pledge written by Kaichi says that the relationship between society and a company and between the company and the individual should nurture independence in the employees who work in them, based on the guiding principle that the nurturing of independent-minded people is the path to the future. Genichi Kawakami adopted this same company pledge for Yamaha Motor, and continued to encourage its spread among the employees of both companies.

In 1987, exactly 100 years after Torakusu Yamaha repaired his first organ, Nippon Gakki changed its name to Yamaha Corporation. In 1955, Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd. was spun off from Nippon Gakki as a separate company. While the two companies specialize in the different fields of sound/music and vehicles, they share the same Yamaha brand name and corporate roots, and with *Kando* as their key word, both seek to bring more fulfilling lives to people all over the world. As seen with the recent announcement of "project AH A MAY" that has Yamaha Corporation attempting designs for mobility and Yamaha Motor doing the same for musical instruments, these two companies born of challenge and creativity still sometimes join hands in attempts to add new dimensions to the Yamaha brand, an effort that continues to this day.



Yamaha Corporation's logomark (top) has the ends of the tuning forks completely inside the outer ring, the middle portion of the letter "M" not touching the base line and block letters that are slightly right-left asymmetrical. The Yamaha Motor one (bottom) has right-left symmetry with its letters. The corporate color of Yamaha Corporation is violet while Yamaha Motor uses red

Message from the Editor



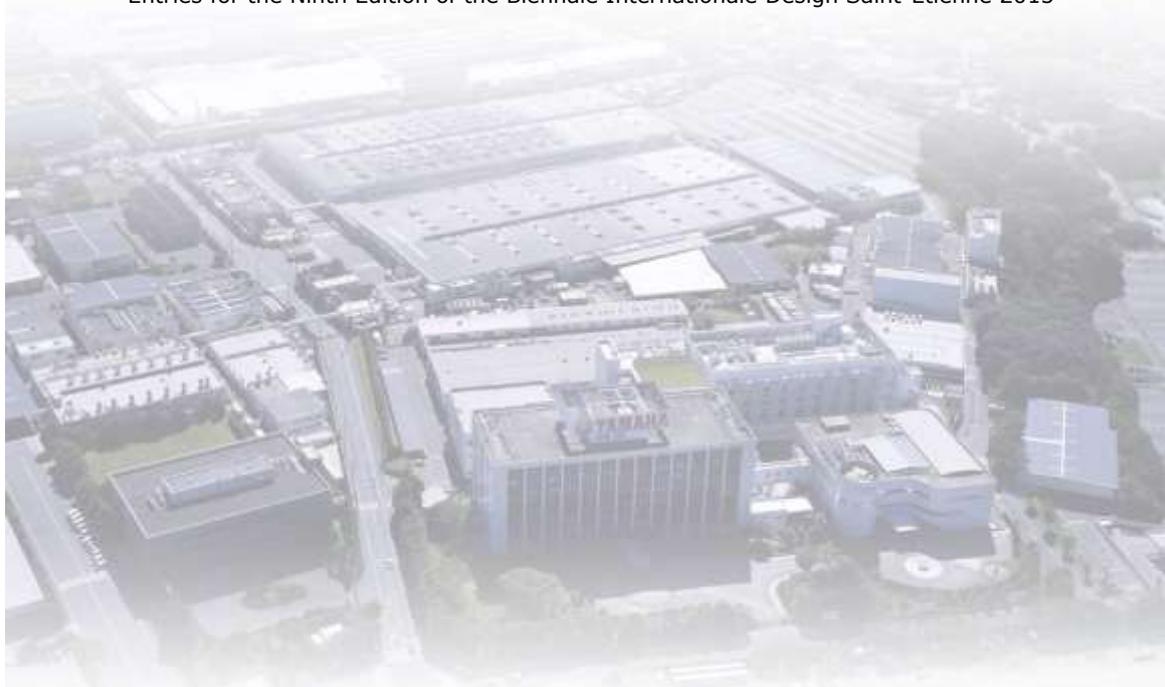
Did you find out some new things in this issue about the relationship between Yamaha Corporation and Yamaha Motor? Like Yamaha Motor, Yamaha Corporation was also founded because of an exceptional challenge taken on by its founder. It also gave me a chance to take a fresh look at both versions of the Tuning Fork Mark.

By the way, have you seen these creations of “[project AH A MAY](#)” that the two Yamaha companies worked together on and entered in a design contest in France? I think the pieces are really striking and cool, and a good example of the harmony of spirit in the two companies.

Ryoko Ota



Entries for the Ninth Edition of the Biennale Internationale Design Saint-Etienne 2015



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