

Onitsuka Tiger is an iconic shoe brand produced by sporting goods company ASICS. Despite once disappearing from the market, it has been revived as a fashionable sneaker brand with global popularity.

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ONITSUKA TIGER

SHOES THAT RUN AROUND THE WORLD



ONITSUKA Tiger is a shoe brand launched by Kihachiro Onitsuka, the founder of Onitsuka Corporation, who in 1950 became known for developing basketball shoes for athletes, a technically challenging feat at that time. Onitsuka continued to develop pro-level footwear for various sports, and his creations could be seen on athletes across the world in international competitions such as the Olympic Games. The Onitsuka Tiger brand was discontinued, however, when Onitsuka Corporation merged with another sporting wear and goods maker in 1977 to become ASICS Corporation.

The sporting goods brand finally reappeared on the global market in 2002. According to Ryoji Shoda, executive officer of ASICS and head of Onitsuka Tiger in charge of brand building, one reason for the revival was the number of requests from people in the European fashion industry. “To coordinate with

the simple clothes trending at the time, sophisticated and thin-bottomed low-profile shoes were a good match,” he reports. “I heard that some were recommending Onitsuka Tiger shoes.”

Around the same time there was a rising retro sneaker boom around Europe, and a film where the main character wore Onitsuka Tiger shoes became an international hit. Both helped bolster Onitsuka Tiger’s popularity. Today, Onitsuka Tiger consistently attracts the attention of fashionistas within and outside of Japan through sponsoring or co-hosting events such as music festivals and fashion shows.

“Onitsuka Tiger has an originality that surpasses temporary trends, and many people love Japan and the quality of Japanese products,” says Shoda about the reasons behind the shoe brand’s continuing popularity overseas. Of course, they do not forget the importance of comfort. Onitsuka Tiger captures



Photo by Kouichi Nakazawa (ZENI.LLC)

- 1 Onitsuka Tiger's popular NIPPON MADE shoes are lovingly crafted at their factory in Tottori Prefecture
- 2 Sleek and simple, Onitsuka Tiger shoes have an originality that goes beyond trends
- 3 The flagship store in Omotesando offers all the variations of the shoes



people's hearts not only because of their design but also thanks to their great functionality.

"ASICS technology allows us to create shoes that are comfortable all day long," Shoda remarks.

The brand takes a very serious attitude toward manufacturing, and sometimes they spend an entire day considering what must be done to improve a single product. "You may think we don't have to be so detail-oriented and should instead think about making our products cheaper," Shoda says, "but I think our dedication is important. When customers experience the quality of our product every time they wear our shoes, whether it's the first time they put them on, after a few months or even a year later, that is what leads them to buy the next pair from us."

Onitsuka Tiger's NIPPON MADE series represents this spirit of Japanese manufacturing. The series is vastly popular but constantly in short supply due to the amount of work and meticulous attention to the

materials, dyeing, sewing and finishing work each pair requires.

Onitsuka Tiger kicks are sold primarily in flagship stores in Japan and Korea. In other countries, mass retailers and directly managed stores sell them, but the brand intends to open flagship stores overseas as well. In Japan, the brand's flagship store and NIPPON MADE series store are in Omotesando, where customers can check out all the variations of the shoes. "The flagship shop is an important place to showcase the brand," Shoda says. "I want to promote Onitsuka Tiger's quality products to new customers while also showing our appreciation for our longtime fans."

Creating new products while maintaining their commitment to quality is at the heart of the company's Japanese-style craftsmanship, and their shoes are sure to continue gaining fans all around the planet. **T**