

Quick Biz Reading

You meet the nicest people on a Honda



Soichiro Honda was a mechanic at a garage. His job was to tune-up cars. He prepared them for races. Honda founded Tōkai Seiki, a car parts company in 1937.

This company won a contract to make parts for Toyota. But soon after, he lost the contract. His parts weren't good enough. He took the time to better

understand Toyota's quality control processes. By 1941, Honda was able to mass-produce parts good enough for Toyota.

Toyota bought a 40% stake in Honda's company. But Honda was demoted. His job went down from being president to senior managing director. Tōkai Seiki's manufacturing plants were destroyed in US bomb attacks in 1944. Honda sold what was left of the company to Toyota. He used the money to start the Honda Technical Research Institute in October 1946.

He worked with a staff of 12 men in a 16-square meter shop. They build small engines. They made and sold motorized bicycles. They also sold the engines customers could attach to their bicycles.

By the 1950's they were selling lots of motorbikes with small engines. In 1959, they started selling the Honda 50 in the USA. This had a different image than motorcycles at the time. The motorbikes were bright colors. They weren't for "tough guy" bikers in black leather jackets. Their advertising slogan: *You meet the nicest people on a Honda*. The bikes became popular with students, housewives and businessmen.

Honda Motor Company grew to become the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles by 1964.

After that, Honda started making mini pick-up trucks. Finally they entered the car market. Today is a serious competitor to Toyota.

❶ Work with a partner. In Japanese, talk about this story. How much do you remember?

❷ With your partner, try to tell the same story in English.

❸ Take it deeper. Before Honda, motorcycles had a bad "tough guy" image. What products (or their customers) have a bad image today? How would you change the products or the image?

Adapted from "4 inspiring short stories of starting up world famous companies" Abhash Kumar. 2 March 2014

<https://yourstory.com/2014/03/inspiring-stories/>

<https://www.si.com/vault/1964/05/11/607211/the-sporty-honda-50-is-changing-the-publics-image-of-the-motorcyclist>