

Interview with Igor Akrapovič, owner

Back when you were racing motorcycles, would you have thought that your exhaust systems would be used by the best riders in the world?

Not really. When I raced, I mainly focused on my racing career. At the time, each of us riders was convinced we could become a world champion someday.

Over the last fourteen years, you've won practically everything there was to win. The Akrapovič company has over eighty world championship titles in every possible class of car and motorcycle racing. Are you satisfied with what you've achieved, or do you believe there's more to be won?

Of course I'm satisfied, but the fact remains that even more titles could have been won. I have to emphasize that you can't compare the path of a company like this to a short race, but more to longer ones. If I made a joke and compared our path to races, I'd say our path isn't so much like a short MotoGP race as it is like the long and difficult Dakar Rally. In the end, it's not only the fastest ones that win, but especially those who make the fewest mistakes.

Why did you decide on racing sports? Was the main reason that you yourself used to be an active racer? Would you say the company's philosophy is based on racing sports?

Yes. It all goes back to the time when I admired the racers in the world championship, at the time in the up-to-500 cc class. I wanted to be part of that and at the time I worked out a strategy in that direction that's still with us today. To be completely honest, races were basically the only thing that really interested me at the time.

Compared to the competition, what are the advantages of Akrapovič exhaust systems, which have been confirmed by many best brand awards?

Well, there are several segments of course, but if you're asking about the one I care about the most, the sports segment, then the priorities are in improving engine power and reducing weight, but of course sound and design are important too.

What would you say was the turning point in your company that marked the company's path?

The turning point may have been when we started cooperating with the Kawasaki team in the Superbike class in 1996. Ever since then, it seems like things have been dramatically different.

What else? Were there any other milestones?

Of course. In 1997, the company moved to a new and bigger location. In 2000, we won the first world championship in the Superbike class with Colin Edwards and Honda. In the automotive segment, a turning point was clearly the start of our cooperation with Audi and the first victory at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Among the most recent achievements, the first victory in the royal class clearly has to be mentioned. We recorded a victory and the championship title in the MotoGP class with Yamaha and Jorge Lorenzo.

What are the trends today and what are the forecasts for the future? How demanding are the buyers and how demanding will they become?

Of course, there's a strong tendency towards ecology. There's a tendency to reduce fuel consumption and weight, but we also have to be careful to give the product an attractive design and make it sound good. We need to make compromises, and it's difficult to make an optimal exhaust system that the market accepts well.

You mentioned sound, power, weight, and design. Which of these is the most important? Is there something that especially stands out?

It depends on the segment. Looking at the sports segment, power and weight are the most important. In the segments that are newer to us, like the custom segment, design and sound are the most important. It's similar in the scooter segment.

What about the materials? What makes your products different from the competition?

I think the difference mainly lies in the fact that we mostly use titanium when manufacturing exhaust systems, which the competition uses only rarely. This especially applies to the automobile segment, where we're more or less the only ones that make titanium exhaust systems in our regular production processes.

You mentioned that the company recently entered the custom motorcycle segment and the scooter segment. Since the company's foundations are based on racing sports and motorcycles, what led you to make the decision to enter the custom segment?

Markets change, and with the speed limits being introduced in Europe and in the United States, it seems like interest in supersport motorcycles is somewhat on the decline. The scooter segment and custom motorcycle segment are on the rise, so our interest in entering these segments makes sense, of course.

The Akrapovič company is also increasingly present in the automobile segment. This segment has represented a large part of the company's operation since 2008. As early as 2004, you cooperated with one of the Formula 1 teams. Where in the automotive world do you see your company over the next years?

Formula 1 is an excellent testing ground, especially in recent years, because new engines are entering this sport: hybrids, supercharged engines, and more. In addition to manufacturing exhaust systems, we also see our future in manufacturing individual components of turbochargers. At the moment, we're in the phase of acquiring a new machine that will be able to manufacture the most demanding parts of automobile turbochargers and other components for four-stroke engines, whose manufacture is very challenging.

Does this also apply to products that come from your titanium foundry?

Of course. Over the next years, I expect a major increase in demand for titanium products. In addition to the automobile and motorcycle industry, titanium is increasingly being used in the food industry and aeronautics. The largest increase can of course still be seen in the automobile industry. Turbine

impellers, for example, are a product that greatly improves the efficiency of turbochargers and thus supercharged engines for motor vehicles.

You are slowly approaching the twenty-fifth anniversary of your company. Where and how do you see the Akrapovič brand in another twenty-five years? Are you planning to enter any other new segments? Do you think you might take a path that isn't related to cars and motorcycles or to automobile and motorcycle sports?

Why not? We're experts in titanium products, and we see a lot of business opportunities in this segment. After all, in order to ensure the security and stability of the company, which already employs over 550 people today, we have to look at different markets and industry branches. We have to diversify our activities because this will allow us to stand even more firmly on our feet.

If we take the end of this interview back to where we started it—that is, to racing sports—we're interested in whether you still ride a motorcycle and whether you follow races or even still go to them?

I still like to ride motorcycles. I have to admit that I rarely have time, so the motorcycle mostly stays parked in the garage waiting for me. I go to races just like I ride my bike: as much as time allows me. However, when the races are on TV, I don't miss a single one. This is our basis and I want to know about what's going on at the racetracks all the time so we can react quickly if necessary.

Aren't you ever tempted to sit in a racecar and as a former racer, at least on four wheels, make a fast lap?

Not really. I have to admit that I never saw myself as a car racer. I was often a guest of famous racers in the hot copilot seat, and this was always an interesting experience. My heart, however, remains on two wheels.

What are the goals of the Akrapovič company in the near future? In the next five or ten years? Where do you see your brand and where will you direct it?

I'd say our products are mostly sold based on two characteristics: the quality of the product and development, which is related to technology, of course. The brand is also important, and we've been carefully nurturing and developing it for years. We also invest a lot of assets in the brand. Our marketing department operates through two channels: product promotion and brand investment. Now, our brand is already so strong and recognizable that many business partners have been successfully utilizing it in facilitating sales of their products. I believe the company has stayed within the guidelines that it's known for the last few years. I don't rule out the possibility of entering a new segment, but such decisions aren't made overnight, especially if they're a clear change from our company's current sales range.