



ITASHA

Plastered from bumper to bumper with anime girls, these cars are the ultimate expression of otaku fandom.

It is said that otaku know no limit to expressing their passion, and the itasha is certainly proof of that. This car-modding phenomenon involves an owner plastering their car with decorations, decals, quotes, and every other imaginable thing related to their favorite character or anime. How much area should be covered? Every square inch if you can afford it. The result is eye-catching, sometimes even eye-watering. The term itasha is in fact a portmanteau of *itai* (pain) and *sha* (car), denoting the painful cringeworthiness these cars sometimes inspire when looked at. Despite this, the term is widely accepted and loved by itasha owners.

Natsume Kaede is an itasha owner who would, in normal times, attend meetups every week. "Distance is irrelevant to an otaku," he laughs, recounting times he has driven over 12 hours to reach events in Kyushu, the southernmost island in Japan. His car is an homage to *Girls & Panzer*, an anime about schoolgirls who drive military tanks. "I knew I wanted my own itasha when I saw others driving them around the streets," he explains. While the word itasha has negative connotations, itasha numbers have been steadily rising in recent years. Natsume correlates this to anime becoming more mainstream and accepted in Japan and the world over. "TV personalities are open about their love for anime these days," he explains. "Even pachinko machines are pretty much all anime-themed." This global anime takeover has fueled itasha enthusiasts to new heights in adorning their cars—inside and out—with their passion. Millions of yen are spent on getting the perfect custom design for full-body car wraps. "We'll spend any amount of money to show off our love," Natsume laughs. "Otaku money makes the world go around."