

# Ansel Elgort takes on Japan mafia in HBO drama series

By Yuri Kageyama  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — The HBO Max drama series “Tokyo Vice” takes on the perennial story of a novice reporter on the police beat but places it in the bustling exotic landscape of the Japanese capital of the 1990s.

Ansel Elgort of *West Side Story* immersed himself in the leading role not only by learning Japanese so he could speak like a native, but also learning the ropes of an investigative reporter, interviewing people, getting quotes, and writing up a story.

“It was really cool,” he said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

The characters had to feel real, not just be archetypes, Elgort said.

The series, which premiered in April, weaves in allusions to the Japanese film genre depicting organized crime, called “yakuza,” as well as exploring the glitzy night life of hostess bars, where powerful corporate Japanese men rub shoulders with their underworld counterparts.

“You see the yakuza characters. You see them as a family, too. It’s kind of like *The Godfather*, where you see them being bad guys, but you see them at home and how it’s really a family,” Elgort said.

The whole point was to go back and forth smoothly between languages and cultures, all carefully put together to appear authentic to global audiences, the creators and actors said.

Ken Watanabe, who plays a somber and seasoned police detective, said he also served as Japanese language adviser, and gave Elgort the tip to learn all his lines in his native tongue first before trying them out in the foreign language.

That has been a trick Watanabe uses acting in Hollywood, starting with the Tom Cruise period piece *The*

## Japan’s Honda outlines strategy to forge ahead on EVs

By Yuri Kageyama  
AP Business Writer

**T**OKYO — Honda is investing 5 trillion yen (\$40 billion) over the next decade in research, especially to realize a major shift to ecological electric vehicles, the Japanese automaker said.

The products and services in the works will account for more than half of its 8 trillion yen (\$64 billion) research and development budget in that time and will be tailored for each major market, the U.S., China, and Japan.

Efforts in North America will focus on the collaboration with General Motors Co., under which Honda Motor Co. is jointly developing two midsize to large EV models, set for sale in 2024.

By 2027, also under its alliance with GM, Honda plans to offer an affordable electric vehicle that’s competitive with gas-powered models in performance and pricing.

Top automakers are accelerating electric car offerings amid pressing concerns about climate change, while also employing new kinds of fuel, such as biofuel and hydrogen-powered fuel cells.

Honda will launch 30 EV models globally by 2030, targeting production of more than 2 million vehicles a year, according to the maker of the Accord sedan, Asimo robot, and Gold Wing motorcycles.

They will span the whole range of models, from tiny vans to muscular sports cars.

“We will continue to deliver the kind of fun in driving that our customers have come to expect from Honda,” said chief executive Toshihiro Mibe.

In China, where the move to electric vehicles is especially bullish, Honda is introducing 10 new EV models by 2027.

In Japan, a market dominated by gas-electric hybrids, Honda will start with small commercial vehicles, such as delivery vans.

Businesses are likely to be more open to such investment because of the Japanese government’s sustainability goals, officials said.

A commercial-use mini-EV model at the 1 million yen (\$8,000) price range will go on sale in Japan in 2024, while other EVs, including sport-utility models, for regular consumers will follow, they said.

By the late 2020s, Honda hopes to have a breakthrough on next-generation batteries.

It also will develop related software since electric vehicles need recharging infrastructure and could add features such as robotics and avatars.

Like other automakers, Honda lost business during the coronavirus pandemic. But it’s forecasting an operating profit of 800 billion yen (\$6.4 billion) for the fiscal year that ended in March.



*Last Samurai*. For “Tokyo Vice,” Watanabe also studied cops, he said, to probe deeper into his character, a loving family man and tough crime fighter at once.

“Tokyo Vice” is loosely based on a non-fiction firsthand account by Jake Adelstein, who spent years in Japan and

**REPORTER’S STORY.** The HBO Max drama series “Tokyo Vice” takes on the perennial story of a novice reporter on the police beat but places it in the bustling exotic landscape of the Japanese capital of the 1990s. Pictured is Ansel Elgort in a scene from “Tokyo Vice.” (HBO Max via AP)

worked for a top newspaper.

“You’re always looking at the storyteller for a dynamic genre story by characters with incredible stakes, but how to come in with a different angle?” said Tony-winning J.T. Rogers, writer of the series and a friend of Adelstein since they were teens in Missouri.

“It creates a dynamism that we hope the audience will find interesting,” he said.

Footage shot in Tokyo is filled with iconic touchstones, from the famous Shibuya intersection where crowds crisscross in perfect choreography, to the rigidly bureaucratic offices of the Japanese “salaryman,” whose hierarchical emphasis on respect for higher-ups is oddly paralleled by the yakuza world.

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