

Entries are listed chronologically within tiers. These are just my opinions! I love you even if you love Kiva. 🙏

### Favorite (The highest in A tier):

- **Build:** A top notch Kamen Rider show, with a strong cast of characters, powerful narrative themes, and ambitious setting. Excellently modernizes Showa-era Kamen Rider themes for a new audience. Emotionally powerful, with an emphasis on character dynamics, the nature of technology in warfare, and what it means to be a hero.

### A Tier (I highly recommend it. Negligible problems.):

- **Kuuga:** The first Heisei-era Rider set the tone for the series in the modern day. Focused on the desperate fight against a group of revived ancient monsters who engage in mass murders of civilians following patterns. Episodic as a whole, but has some really intriguing mystery elements and some excellent non-Rider allies for the protagonist. There are some awkward parts though, the protagonist is perhaps a little too cheery for the kind of plot the show has and it has heavy J-Drama influences, for better and for worse.
- **555:** One of the darkest Rider shows, and the only Inoue show I ever enjoyed. You absolutely have to be in a \*mood\* to watch it. Focuses on the conflict between humans and people who died and mutated into a kind of monster. Witness a catastrophic trainwreck of lack of communication, physical and emotional abuse, and general Inoue bullshit. Obviously rough in some places, but hard to tear yourself away from.
- **Kabuto:** This was the first Rider show to air in HD, and has some appropriately stunning visuals to showcase that, with high speed battles and some great suit designs. It has it all: fun characters, an interesting story, a surreal sense of humor, and food porn. Fair warning, the show has an anything goes attitude towards its plot, so you have to be willing to roll with whatever nonsense it throws at you.
- **W:** Has a unique gimmick with its two-in-one protagonists, who have to work together as a single Kamen Rider and partners at a detective agency, which the show uses to great effect. Has some excellent highlights: Shotaro and Philip are some of the best KR protagonists and compliment each other nicely, the villains are extremely interesting, nice mystery elements, some great side characters, and one of the most bizarrely sob-inducing scenes I have ever seen. The only weaknesses are the occasional weak episodes and middling secondary Rider. It also moves at a meandering pace, but almost always moving the plot forward even when it isn't obvious.
- **Fourze:** One of the more lighthearted Rider shows, with a space theme and highschool aged protagonists. The protagonist has an infectious good nature and the show places a lot of emphasis on the friendship between people with diverse personalities. Some impressive mystery elements and fun episodes make it a blast to watch. I can never get mad at this show, it is too wholesome.
- **Ex-Aid:** Focuses on the incredible concept of GAMER DOCTORS. Obviously a bit silly, but manages some good drama and much more character depth than would be initially

expected. Drags near the end, but greatly enjoyable overall with swift pacing and great performances by the actors, including a performance by Dan Kuroto's actor that is the stuff of legends among toku fans. Also has some of the tackiest suits ever created, absolutely beautiful.

**B Tier (I recommend it with caveats. Some detracting issues, but strongly outweighed by the positives.):**

- **Black RX:** My personal favorite Showa-era show, the unpopular sequel to Black. Has some interesting transitional characteristics due to being the last show before the series went into hiatus during the 90s. A bit more modern in style, and distinctly aping some Sentai traits, I found the whole experience surprisingly fun and a respectful yet superior follow-up to the original.
- **Gaim:** Great escalation of the conflict from kids having street battles to an apocalypse of in-fighting. Has a great sense of style and some excellent performances by the actors. Suffers from some awkward characterization and erratic quality though. Kind of indescribably cool.
- **Zero-One:** Has a really striking setting, occurring in the middle of the singularity as robots gain sentience. Visually spectacular, with some really clean choreography and only occasional visual jank. Many excellent characters, with the protagonist in particular being incredibly likable. The narrative also manages to pull off some frankly insane emotional highs. However, the pandemic has a major negative impact on aspects of the show, particularly the pacing, along with some poor pacing decisions even before that was a factor.
- **Saber:** A fun JRPG-esque show. It has a large but (mostly) enjoyable cast that has a lot of charm, nice fights, and some fantastic episodes in the middle bookended by some good to okay early and late parts. It's fun, but can be predictable and contrived.

**C Tier (I generally wouldn't suggest it to people, but I also wouldn't turn away someone who was interested in trying it. Notably flawed, but still solidly enjoyable.):**

- **V3:** This Showa-era show is the equivalent to some good vanilla ice cream. Nothing special and very archetypical, but good fun if you enjoy watching older tokusatsu.
- **X:** While this show gets off to a strong and surprisingly dark start, it quickly settles into typical Showa Rider content. Apollo Geist as a suave rival to X and Jin Keisuke's very personable actor still manage to be highlights though.
- **Amazon:** One of the more unique Showa Riders, the setting is more fantasy-inspired and focuses on a guy who can barely speak Japanese and can turn into a lizardman. Short and sweet at 24 episodes, some highlights include the comically violent fights and the protagonist's kaijin ally.
- **Stronger:** A so-bad-it's-good Showa Rider. Possessing a shoestring budget even for the time, the effects are particularly laughable and the plots frequently incoherent. Good zero-thoughts fun.

- **Skyrider:** Though starting off as fairly standard Showa fare, the show becomes progressively goofier as it goes along until it becomes bizarrely entertaining. There's some random man in a monkey suit with no discernable backstory or reason for existing. There's like 6 episodes in a row near the end themed after kitschy horror. This and so much more! The protagonist is also fairly novel for a Showa lead, more of a slightly dim everyman than a brilliant person at the top of his field. I had way too much fun with it.
- **Black:** The cult-classic among Showa Riders, I personally found it rather overrated. It does have some cool fights and a darker, more overarching plot as a whole, but still feels like a Showa show through and through. Most of the best content is at the beginning and end.
- **Ryuki:** A highly influential Rider show that truly introduced Rider vs Rider conflict. Has some genuinely good dramatic elements and quite a few good characters. The show drags at quite a few parts though, has some absolutely bafflingly stupid story elements, and tone whiplash so bad it will leave the watcher reeling.
- **Wizard:** A rare fantasy themed Rider show that is oriented around magic powers. The plot is often silly and the protagonist is too perfect, but it is pretty fun to just sit down and watch. Occasionally has some surprising narrative kick.
- **Drive:** A mystery themed Rider show in a similar vein to W, but from more of an ensemble police drama angle.. The story is pretty standard, and the protagonists are relatively "safe" as a whole, but the antagonists are actually extremely interesting and the highlight of the show.
- **Black Sun:** I'm glad that this show exists, as bleak and awkward as it is. As much as there were moments that had me gawking at the screen for the complete lack of nuance for both social issues and character writing it was such a genuinely shocking and strange show that definitely got me thinking.

**D Tier (I would encourage people to avoid these. Serious problems that outweigh the good in the show.):**

- **Kamen Rider:** The original show has a strong beginning, but crawls along at a snail's pace through almost 100 insane episodic plots as the story rapidly loses what made it interesting in the first place.
- **Agito:** A spiritual sequel to Kuuga, this is one of the most genuinely boring toku I've watched. The plodding narrative lacks the punch of Kuuga, and I found myself regularly zoning out mid-episode as characters yammer on about psychic powers through a green camera filter for the 30th time. A few good characters and the protagonist's... bemusing dynamic with the secondary Rider help it a bit, but not nearly enough.
- **Den-O:** This is a lighter and more humorous Rider show. Unfortunately, the humor failed to land for me more often than not, likely partially because of language boundaries and partially because I just didn't like the style. I also tended to find the cast more annoying than charming. Deneb is a good boy though.
- **OOO:** Unfortunately, it epitomizes everything I dislike at times about Kobayashi as a writer: excessively quirky characters with low depth, an irritating dynamic between the 2 lead characters, and a feeling of a lack of planning in the story. It doesn't seem too bad

on a surface level, but really got under my skin as I watched, especially the later episodes. A lot of people love this one, but it ain't for me.

- **Ghost:** Has the cool concept of being about a dead protagonist who is trying to gain the power to come back to life. A few decent stretches of episodes and some nice characters aren't enough to save the show from a lack of internal consistency, incoherent writing, and incredibly uninteresting primary and secondary Riders. The show is bad in a way where I can't conceive of how most of the mistakes were made, which makes it interesting at least.
- **Revice:** A show about a family who become Riders who fight alongside their inner demons. This show has a really good concept, but ultimately wasn't able to live up to expectations. Wildly inconsistent pacing, an overly-large cast, messy fights, and poorly established mechanics! It had some decent stretches of episodes and nice characterization at times, but it just didn't come together into a cohesive experience.

#### F Tier (I would STRONGLY encourage people to avoid these. Severely, critically flawed.):

- **Hibiki:** A very unique first half focused on Oni fighting against human eating monsters, with a coming of age narrative. Gets absolutely DESTROYED in the second half when Inoue took over to get the show back on budget and schedule. If you just watch the first half it is a pretty good show!
- **Kiva:** Uuuuuuuuuugh.
- **Geats:** A battle royale show, sort of like a modernized Ryuki. It starts off full of intrigue, but the story and characters arcs both tend to meander and have sudden, absurd developments that lead to the show feeling like several partially finished shows stuck together. It's hard to even follow what is happening later on and feels like a distillation of several late 2010s / early 2020s Rider trends that many fans dislike, such as cheap revivals and everyone and their dog being a Kamen Rider. Being self-aware doesn't make you good.

#### X Tier (Can't deal with the mixed messages I got from here, need to rewatch):

- **Blade:** I have no idea how to process this one. I think I need to rewatch it, because I tried to take it seriously the first time, which was a mistake. I've heard this one called "The Room" of Kamen Rider, which I am inclined to agree with. A chaotic show that veers between stunted drama in the beginning and genuine tragedy in the end.