

EXCEEDING EVEN ITS REPUTATION

Years of anticipation pay off

BY JOE SARGE

Nissan is in the middle of a huge update of its product lineup. Altima and Pathfinder will be all new for 2013, announced by the time you read this, Sentra next after those. The 370Z (Nissan's other sports car, or set of sports cars, including coupe, roadster and NISMO), is having sheetmetal and features refreshed.

There are a few details new in the Nissan GT-R for 2013. The car's advanced 3.8-liter twin-turbo V6 has been retuned to 545 hp and 463 lb-ft of torque, a rise of 15 points for each. The car's suspension tuning has been revised. There is a new handmade dry carbon fiber rear spoiler (only on the Black Edition), and a backup monitor has been added as standard.

But mostly they have left the GT-R just as it was: a very complete and winning formula.

Our test car was the revised 2013 model, and it was the Black Edition.

The Nissan GT-R carries a base price of \$96,820 for the Premium model, or \$106,320 for the Black Edition. That extra \$9,500 for the Black Edition buys you the aforementioned spoiler, super lightweight black forged alloy RAYS® wheels (20 inches, 9.5 wide in the front and 10.5 wide in the rear), plus black and red Recaro

leather-appointed front seats, with matching red leather on the door pulls and shift lever. Those are all appealing features, so we would say as long as you're spending this much money, go for that package.

The only available options are [a] a Super Silver Special Metallic paint for \$3000 and [b] floor mats for \$285. Our test car came in Solid Red paint, and we would be just fine with that. And it had the floor mats, so with \$1000 destination (pricey—are these actually harder than average to deliver?), it was out the door for \$107,605 before taxes and registration.

We're not surprised to find such a short options list. From the moment you get in this car, through the first quarter mile and the next hundred or thousand miles, you are unlikely to think of anything you would remove, nor anything you would add—other than perhaps a full manual transmission.

The GT-R comes with a dual-clutch 6-speed paddle-shift transmission, a manual but without that third pedal. We are grudgingly willing to accept the concept that this car—with its 2-point-something-second 0-to-60 acceleration time—is just too much for a manual to handle. Or at least it would be underperforming, by that measure. The dual-clutch system consumes just 0.15 seconds between shifts. But still....

As for that 2-point-something acceleration time, search online and you will find a great many who can beat the official 2.9 seconds. And with numbers like that, on a car like this, everyone will keep trying. After all, the GT-R holds a Guinness World



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Record as the fastest 0-to-60 production four-seater.

We're among the first to note that electronic features are in an era of some overkill, in a lot of cases, and we often praise Nissan for keeping this under control. But in the GT-R, electronics are applied as they might be by NASA: prodigiously, with great purpose and with stellar results. The transmission is one example, with R, normal and save modes—appropriate for, respectively, maximum performance and quickest shifts; road smoothness; or long-distance highway driving, also useful on slippery surfaces.

Those slippery surfaces also benefit—as does dry road or track performance—from the GT-R's full-time all-wheel-drive system—with a rear-mounted transaxle that integrates the transmission, differential and AWD transfer case, a carbon-composite propeller shaft and high-performance mechanical limited-slip differential.

This works with Nissan's Vehicle Dynamic Control (VDC), the car's electronic stability system, which also has electronics highly involved. VDC has R, normal and off modes—for performance driving, daily driving, or off for when you're stuck in mud or snow.

The GT-R's four-wheel independent suspension has a Bilstein DampTronic system which is also controllable through R, normal and comfort modes.

Brakes are codeveloped Nissan/Brembo 15.4" (front) and 15.0" (rear) full-floating drilled rotors featuring diamond-pattern internal ventilation, with 6-piston (front) and 4-piston (rear) calipers. These stop the car in barely over 100 feet—and look great.

Three switches on the instrument panel allow you to make on-the-fly adjustments to the suspension, VDC stability control and dual-clutch transmission.

What wins us over with the GT-R's electronics is not only their implementation, but the interface. As soon as we sat down, we were impressed with the apparent analog gauge layout, and it's all the better for being digital, as this allows you to change what you're displaying, contextually or on a whim. Nissan is not the only one to use digital displays to mimic analog gauges, but they do it so well. There are eleven screens available, and four customizable displays.

With all this performance emphasis, the GT-R has not in the least ignored creature comforts. Besides the firm and comfortable Recaro seats and a great interior layout overall, the car has touchscreen or voice-activated nav (with XM NavTraffic and NavWeather), Bluetooth™ hands-free phone and wireless (or USB) audio streaming with steering wheel controls, feeding a Bose eleven-speaker system with dual subwoofers at the rear seats.

The Nissan GT-R is one of the few cars that can make that Panamera driver in the background jealous.

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THE ONE AND ONLY NISSAN GT-R

Our first time with the Nissan GT-R was during the Copperstate 1000 Road Rally this spring. We drove multiple high-performance cars and special editions that day (see page 16), and this was our steed from lunch at Roosevelt Lake, back up AZ 188 to the Beeline Highway. We took turns on that stretch with another driver—a licensed racer, in fact, which was a big plus. As much fun as we had driving the GT-R, we had easily as much fun handing it over to this other driver, who pushed it to every limit you can on a public highway. We were happy to know we would be visiting with the car again, for several days a few weeks later.

No matter how much you drive this car, your appetite remains whetted. It's the kind of car with so much com-

fort, control and performance that you want to just stay in that seat and drive it coast to coast, right now.

A Nissan GT-R was available for years in Japan, as the righthand-drive Nissan Skyline GT-R—well known to enthusiasts as a costar in the *Fast and Furious* films, and sought after (and secured) by a handful of Americans with not only the cash but the connections to get their hands on one. First produced in the late '60s and early '70s, it was resurrected in 1989, in Japan. Enthusiasts clamored for it to come to the US, and it finally arrived on our shores in 2008.

Top Gear has called the Nissan GT-R Japan's only supercar, and its host Jeremy Clarkson has identified it as one of the best cars in the world. To anyone who has followed it for the last two decades or more, the Nissan GT-R will always stand out from the crowd. At the same time, it avoids the ostentatious (and yet familiar) appearance of, say, a Ferrari or Lamborghini in traffic. You might say it works like a hand-made Aston Martin used to work, when there were only a few on the roads—understated, performance-elegant and potent as all getout.

Unlike most any of its competitors, the Nissan GT-R is a car you don't see every day. Don't ever let one pass you by without a special nod. ■

