

Pureblood

by Joe Sage

The Z-car has been through considerable evolution during its more than half century of existence, yet all generations have borne the unmistakable core identity of this living legend. But while styling and numbers have changed over the years, there remains something magical about that first Datsun 240Z that has always suggested its purest form.

The first image of the new seventh generation Z (no numbers) was so clean and simple, it looked much like an early sketch rendering—a compliment as much as anything, as realities usually take a lot of fun out of concepts

on their way to production. Reality in this case did not lose its compass, as the new car holds true

to the concept's intentions and origins.

The grille, which seemed large in its first sketches, looks completely different in final form, with split upper and lower treatments. In fact—as promptly noted by an enthusiastic six-Z owner who pulled in to join us in a parking lot—visualizing a gen-one 240Z with its simple chrome bumper removed unlocks the whole secret, and the rest of the car's simplicity follows suit. Some have called the new Z retro. To us, it feels fully contemporary, simply delivering the pure spirit of the car's soul.

The 2023 Nissan Z is offered in Sport and

Performance trims (our pre-production prototype is the latter), plus a Proto Spec edition in its first year, limited to 240 units (a 240Z nod).

All have a 400-hp 3.0-liter V6 twin turbo engine—an upgrade from the 370Z's 332-hp 3.7-liter V6—and choice of 6-speed manual transmission with motorsports-based EXEDY high-performance clutch, or a 9-speed automatic (replacing the 370's 7-speed auto) with paddle shift (either transmission at the same price).

The Performance trim is quickly recognizable by its side sill, front chin and rear spoilers. Paints include three with the roof the same color and six two-tones (none repeating from the monotonies) with a black roof.

The drivetrain is all intensely performance-oriented (see specs in sidebar), and the line-

up offers 18- or 19-inch wheels, in both cases staggered fitments (wider in the rear).

The two-seater's cockpit bears an atmosphere evoking the original 240Z, driver-centric, with an analog triple-pod cluster atop the dash (turbo boost, turbine speed, voltmeter), a racing-inspired 12.3-inch customizable TFT meter display and a standard 8-inch touchscreen (with 6-speaker audio) or optional 9-incher (with 8-speaker Bose audio) on the Performance trim. Black cloth seats with synthetic suede inserts are standard, with heated leather sport seats available on Performance, as are other performance and tech upgrades.

It should take little time to decide whether to opt for the base Sport trim or spend exactly 10 grand more for Performance, each with its own irresistible formula.

As a prototype, we had this car for just two full drive days. It arrived with several hours'



worth of fresh detailing and polishing, but these quickly turned into a couple of the stormiest days of this or any year.

You might expect a small 400-hp two-seat sports coupe—just 3536 pounds, thanks to a high-strength steel offset by aluminum hood, doors and hatchback—to feel like a skateboard with a rocket engine. But the new Z feels far more substantial than its forebear of (cont'd)

SPECIFICATIONS

(Note: prototype vehicle.)

ASSEMBLY	.....Kaminokawa, Tochigi, Japan
BUILD	.....unibody; corrosion-resistant high-strength steel, alum hood-doors-hatch
ENGINE	.....3.0L twin-turbo V6 24v DOHC longitudinal, CVTCS, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....400 hp / 350 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....10.3:1
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd manual close-ratio, synchro rev-match, high-performance clutch
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD, carbon fiber composite driveshaft (6MT only), mechanical clutch-type limited-slip diff (6MT only)
SUSPENSION	.....F: dbl wishbone alum, high vacuum diecast alum alloy subframe, monotube shocks, stblzr bar; R: indep multi-link alum, steel subframe, monotube shocks, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....elec (rack) power steering
BRAKES	.....F: 14.0 x 1.26 vented, floating 4-piston alum; R: 13.8 x 0.79 vented disc, 2-piston alum; red calipers
WHEELS	.....RAYS® super lightweight forged alum alloy; F: 19x9.5; R: 19x10
TIRES	.....Bridgestone Potenza S007 high-perf; F: P255/40R19; R: P275/35R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....172.4 / 100.4 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....4.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....na
HEADROOM	.....38.2 in
LEGROOM	.....42.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....na
WEIGHT	.....3536 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....prem unl / na gal
MPG	.....18/24/20 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$49,990
PREMIUM TWO-TONE PAINT:	
Seiran Blue Metallic / Super Black	.....1295
ILLUMINATED KICK PLATES	.....500
FLOOR MATS	.....400
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1025
TOTAL	.....\$53,210

2023 NISSAN Z LINEUP

Z Sport	.....9-spd auto	.....\$39,990
	6-spd manual	.....39,990
Z Performance	.....9-spd auto	.....49,990
	6-spd manual	.....▼ 49,990
Z Proto Spec	.....9-spd auto	.....52,990
	6-spd manual	.....52,990



50 years prior. And it is a hoot to drive, from the very first block. Highly connected to the road beneath its feet, the Z's handling is very precise. Acceleration and steering can solve any traffic knot. Its tight but unspecified turning circle was equally impressive.

Cruising Carefree Highway when the weather took its turn for the worse, we opted to zig and zag back into the grid via far less trafficked secondary streets—a plus for solitude, though visibility was dropping toward zero, with few clues from the lights of others. To crank the heat, there's a simple dial control. Perfect. We were happier still to have heated seats, something you didn't have in a '69 240Z.

The second day's weather brought a great mix of calm and adventure—heavy rain, temperatures of every sort, and with numerous sprawling sand washes, not always where you would expect them. Much as we appreciate the pure feel of the original car, we were definitely glad to have such modern touches as traction control through those loose spots.

While we often give a tightly patterned 6-speed manual an instinctive doublecheck as

we shift, the new Z shows the next selected gear in the binnacle readout before you've let out the clutch and engaged. It's split-second stuff, not strictly necessary, but useful.

As outfitted, our manual transmission included blip-shifting and accompanying sound effects—shift down, and the revs goose up, increasing the odds of proper engagement, enhanced to show off a bit, mostly intended to ease the learning curve for new manual drivers, itself is a noble purpose indeed. But we prefer mastering the manual mechanicals and would recommend the same to anyone.

We had noticed the binnacle gear readout always had an "S" next to the number. Turns out it was in SynchroRev Match S-Mode, a long and formal name for that rev-matching blip-shifting. (Rev-matching is a common but debatable term, as it really spins things into a wider range than a "match," for higher odds of engagement than a non-blipped single rev rate). There's a small button to the right of the shift lever, that turns this off. (It's easy to miss; we first took it as a celebratory badge with a 6-speed pattern, but it's a control. It does say

S-Mode on it, but it's so shiny, we were unable to read that until we knew it was there.) This is a manual feature only. The automatic instead offers standard and sports drive modes, the latter modifying acceleration, steering and drive dynamics and adding, yes, "active sound enhancement." There's something to be said for most of sports mode's features, other than our general dislike for artificial sound effects (which also draw undue attention from law enforcement, sleeping neighbors or others).

On ours, we turned S-Mode off as soon as we knew we could, immediately transforming our drive into pure manual shift heavenliness.

On our last morning, we gave the car one more good run, to confirm our feelings on this, on lightly-traveled local surface streets, first with S-Mode on, then off. Sue enough, with S-Mode on, we would get up to 3rd gear, gear down to 2nd, and "BLEWWWWWWppp," that rev-matching blip-shifting would kick in. Not our favorite.

To us, the sudden rotational surge of blipping, an automated overlay to a manual sys-

tem, basically interrupts your power curve. And any mainstream manual transmission already has synchro—spinning the gears compatibly, mechanically, before they mesh.

Turning it off turned the Z, for us, into a whole new car, smooth as silk, with no blip—though we are sure that some owners will think blip-shifting is the coolest thing ever—and it's always great to have choices.

We continued our run without S-Mode... 3rd gear...2nd gear...back to 3rd. Roundabout, let's downshift to 2nd...done roundabout, let's go back to 3rd...minivan in front is a little slow, let's go back to 2nd. We preferred this performance, all without a sound effects spectacle for the outside world.

Whoever you are—second-nature shifter or novice, clever mechanical tech enthusiast, electronic-interventionist fan or both—you will love this car inside and out.

They say first impressions are lasting, but we generally notice our last impressions, too. And our final take on the new Nissan Z as we bade it farewell was summed up as we wiped it down, saying, "Well, that was fun!" ■



■ (Below) The weather added major thrills to our adventures, from blinding rain, to reports of near-tornados, to heavy loose sand when the rain let up.

■ (Above) Whatever your manual shift skills or preferences, this shiny little SynchroRev Match S-Mode button is the gateway.

