

# ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 3  
MAY-JUNE 2024



Nissan Z NISMO

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



# Senses engaged

BY JOE SAGE

When we had a week in the new Nissan Z about a year and a half ago, a 2023, it was a Z Performance, the upper of two mainstream trims (along with a pricier first-year Z Proto Spec). All had the same 400-horsepower 3.0-liter twin-turbo V6, and any were available with either a 6-speed manual or 9-speed automatic. Ours then was the 6-speed manual, always welcome. It also had SynchroRev Match, a version of blip-shifting more commonly seen on automatics. (These may be useful for new manual drivers, but we prefer control and certainty over well-meaning help. Our enjoyment went straight to the top by turning that off.) Model year 2024 offers Sport and Performance again, with the same engine, power and choice of transmissions. But new this year is the version we are driving here—the 2024 Nissan Z NISMO, with touches aimed at delivering a track-ready Z Car.

Here, the same basic 3.0L twin-turbo V6 is retuned to 420 horses, with torque increased from 350 to 384 lb-ft. Upgrades also include added engine cooling, a steel driveshaft, retuned steering, bigger NISMO brakes, increased body rigidity, new chassis tuning, stiffer suspension, wider wheels and tires, and revised aerodynamics.

Visual cues include manual Recaro seats, anodized red engine start and mode buttons, and a red band at top dead center of the wheel, an unmistakable reminder of the craft you are piloting.

The Z NISMO runs about \$65 grand versus \$42 or \$52 grand for the others—the difference in price clearly fair and reasonable for what you get.

The only tradeoff in all this—a big one for some—is that the Z NISMO, unlike the others, is automatic-only. If you are a manual fan, the Z is already on your radar, but with all its advantages, the newest top trim has that tradeoff. Was it an engineering need? Or based on estimated sales volume? No, it's for NISMO's track emphasis. The automatic—with revised clutch packs and revised engine management software—is said to down-

shift some 50 percent faster than the manual. If you prefer automatic, anyway, this is all win-win.

Either way, anyone will straight away enjoy the strength and accuracy of the car's powertrain, rear-wheel drive and enhanced chassis. This is a driver's car that wants you to master it.

We headed out to do so on the open road.

We've often philosophized about drive modes. Although their purpose is clear—from a fairly neutral basis for daily driving, with the option of more power and performance when desired, or less but with better fuel economy, perhaps for a long road trip—it would still nag at us that things should just be ideal as built, without constant adaptation.

The spread of drive modes is surely rooted in because-we-can opportunities as electronic management spreads throughout vehicles. Not only can you basically chip your powerplant, as has been the case for decades, but steering and electronics are also now often electronic (originally generally in the interest of weight), thus also easily played with. Maybe it represents indecision in engineering, or maybe pure driver advantage. Our attitude

has begun to shift on this in several similar cases, so we decided to take advantage.

On this Z, all modes, as with the engineering itself, are aimed toward the performance end—standard, sport or sport-plus (no eco or comfort). If we're feeling sporty, we tend to go straight to sport plus, which we promptly dialed in. It gets philosophical. Sport-plus is new on the Z NISMO, again built to be highly track-capable, and it might sound like overkill in town. Or it may just be more fun.

It was not earthshakingly different at first, which is a plus when you don't want sudden power bursts or wildly different steering in traffic. In fact, we didn't notice much change at all on surface streets in town, in fairly light traffic at steady speeds, pretty much in a straight line. But we were soon headed to a curvy, climbing high-speed country highway.

From our last red light, accelerating through a lefthand turn, up to highway speeds, the car upshifted like a fiend—drr,drr,drr,drr—and we were in about 5th gear before we even cleared the turn. Glancing down again, we were already in 8th, then 9th, its top gear. Nice.

From the main highway, we headed off to a great two-lane road, where sport-plus was top-tier through the hills and curves. We switched to stan-

dard, then back pretty quickly, concluding sport-plus tightens up steering and suspension noticeably. You might tend to think that a sportier mode is going to somehow make it faster, and in a sense it does, but it's not about making the engine more powerful—it's that electronic opportunity to amp up the mechanicals.

Heading back onto the four-lane highway, we popped it back into standard mode on a rough stretch of pavement, figuring suspension might soften up, but there seemed to be no meaningful difference, so we popped it back into sport-plus. We started climbing as soon as we did that, and it downshifted right away, into 6th. As we crested the hill, we noted it had smoothly shifted into 5th, a great surprise, giving us good descent control rather than high-gear coasting. Sure enough, when we tried standard on the downhill, it shifted up to 7th, then 8th, for less control. We tried sport here, the middle setting, and it took us only to 7th, not discernibly different. But our old friend sport-plus took us back to 5th and that firm control. Then as we leveled out, it made one smooth-as-silk jump to 9th. It also seemed easy to tell that our steering was tightened up in sport-plus. This is a very solid transmission in mountain driving.

(cont'd)



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	Kaminokawa, Tochigi, Japan (Final assembly stated as Los Angeles)
BODY/CHASSIS.....	unibody, corrosion-resistant resistant high-strength steel, alum hood, doors, hatch
ENGINE.....	3.0L DOHC 24v V6 twin turbo, longitudinal, alum/alum, CVTCS, dir inj
HP/TORQUE.....	(NISMO) 420 hp / 384 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO.....	10.3:1
EXHAUST.....	(AT only) dual w sport muffler; (manual is dual w standard muffler)
TRANSMISSION.....	NISMO-tuned 9-spd auto, launch control (NISMO), paddles
DRIVETRAIN.....	RWD, mech clutch-type limited-slip diff
0-TO-60.....	(third-party meas) 4.0-4.1 sec
SUSPENSION.....	F: dbl-wishbone alum-alloy, alum subframe, solid stblzr bar; monotube shocks; R: multi-link alum-alloy, steel subframe, solid stblzr bar; monotube shocks
STEERING.....	NISMO-tuned elec rack pwr
BRAKES.....	(NISMO) red calipers, alum; F: 15.0x1.3 vented, fixed 4-piston caliper; R: 13.8x0.8 vented, two-piston caliper
WHEELS.....	(NISMO) RAYS® gloss black paint forged alum, staggered: F: 19x10; R: 19x10.5
TIRES.....	(NISMO) Dunlop SP Sport Maxx GT600: F: P255/40R19; R: P285/35R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	173.2 / 100.4 in
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	(NISMO) 4.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	na
HEADROOM.....	38.2 in
LEGROOM.....	42.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	(third-party info) 6.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT.....	(NISMO) 3704 lb
FUEL.....	premium unl
FUEL CAPACITY.....	(third-party info) 16.4 gal
MPG.....	17/24/19 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE.....	<b>\$64,990</b>
PREM PAINT: 2-tone steel grey / black.....	1295
FLOOR MAT PKG: NISMO floor mats, tunk mat, first aid kit, cargo net, owner's manual branded portfolio.....	410
ILLUMINATED KICK PLATE: Black Metallic.....	500
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1095
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	<b>\$68,290</b>

## 2024 NISSAN Z LINEUP

	6MT	9AT
Z Sport.....	\$42,210	\$42,210
Z Performance.....	52,210	52,210
Z NISMO.....		64,990



NISMO stands for Nissan Motorsports International.

We logged specific example after specific example of this gearbox giving us exactly what the situation called for. Slowing down quickly when we saw an opportunity to grab a U-turn through the median, the Z in sport-plus powered us down to 2nd gear, where most standard automatics would likely not even get involved, just leaving our braking to handle the job. Engine braking versus brake-braking can of course be a tradeoff of its own over time (new brakes being far less expensive than a new engine), but sport-plus helps make that decision for you, with its wisdom and engineering strength involving and optimizing both.

Through our next dramatic climb and curves, we had three lanes, sometimes two, to ourselves, so flipped through all three modes. On the one hand, we could be happy in any of them here, while on the other hand, we think you'll find sport-plus irresistible because, after all, it's a Z Car, and that's the sport experience. (And if you have a friend along to impress, sport-plus seems a sure thing.)

Tight as the whole setup is, we were surprised and pleased when we crossed a familiar double rain trough back on the edge of civilization—pretty rough in most vehicles, but not in this, despite this being the mode with the most feedback.

It all makes for a very impressive package. On the one hand, you might think the cost is basically a few thousand more, but it's not all that different. But by the end of the week, we were saying this is magic, this is awesome, it's the top dog top tier

everything version, and only a few grand more. To us it seems fairly irresistible.

But being trim-specific, you can't get that sport-plus mode with manual shift, nor vice versa.

It was about then we realized this automatic came with a revelation. We have multiple reasons for liking manuals, but could sum up by saying they let us feel fully engaged. However, in this, we were very engaged—feeling the chassis, feeling the shifts, feeling the power. They say when you lose a major sense (such as sight or hearing), your other senses become stronger, more acute, more aware. The automatic in this Z is like that. Did its lack of a manual heighten our other senses? It's a very good automatic, so this just might be.

Top notch performance of the transmission and drive modes in the Z NISMO were beyond our expectations, underscoring our newfound appreciation of the best of them. They are core to this car's mission as a track-oriented vehicle, with maximum performance aimed at special times and places. We wouldn't have track time that week, but best of all, special places aren't always just at the track.

When the original Datsun 240Z came to our shores in 1969, it filled a niche pretty much all its own (at least in the US). Flash forward to generation seven, now in its second year, and the Z Car's mission remains just as pure.

We'd still buy a manual if they had it. But even a diehard manual shift fan can find great joy here, firing up the senses beyond just the numbers. ■

