

# SOLVE FOR

With the GT-R now in the equation, Nissan has redone the math for its iconic Z

Words And Photos By Bradley Horn

**L**AS VEGAS, NEVADA — To the amazement of pundits the world over, the Vatican recently hosted a conference on the compatibility of two very strange bedfellows: evolution and creation, marking the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's landmark book, *On the Origin of Species*.

It's been more than few fortnights since the Pope and I have broken bread together, but I can guess where the idea to host this shindig came from: Perhaps his Holiness has driven Nissan's new-for-'09 370Z and realized that evolution can indeed be a religious experience.

You see, for the lion's share of 40 years, the Z was the embodiment of sporting performance for Nissan on our shores. Then last year, the automaker's mighty GT-R came thundering into Canada from across the Pacific, taking the sports car market by storm and whispered threats of natural selection in the Z's ear.

So for 2009, Nissan's original affordable sports coupe has evolved. Nearly every piece and component has been rethought or redesigned, creating the lighter, tighter and more affordable 370Z.

In a welcome change from convention, the new car is down 50 kg from the

previous 350Z, thanks in large part to aluminum bits like the hood, doors and hatch. Riding on the second generation of Nissan's rear-drive FM platform, it's also shorter, lower, wider and reigns in its wheelbase by 10 cm.

Nissan designer Randy Rodriguez, a Vancouver native and rabid fan and owner of past Z cars, penned the 370's exterior. Highlights include the new upswept quarter window hinting at the original 240Z, the "cantilevered" roof mimicking the GT-R, "boomerang" head- and tail-lamps borrowed from the Maxima, "Z" sidemarkers that double as turn signals and those chunky chrome door handles. Nissan says making its new Z shorter made the vehicle more "blunt," calling for extra wind tunnel tuning to counter the negative aerodynamic effects.

The sixth-generation Z adopts a new double wishbone front suspension (replacing the multi-link setup), while bolting in a stiffer and lighter four-link rear setup. Improvements to the coupe's structure, like a more rigid aluminum front suspension cradle, dial up fore and aft body rigidity by 30 and 22 percent respectively.

Naturally, the Z's free-revving VQ V6 has been brought up to speed. Shared >

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with Infiniti's G, the 3.7-litre mill is about 80 percent new, including some high-tech valve timing systems, which improve performance, fuel economy and emissions. Redline rises to 7,500 rpm.

The engine wears a true dual exhaust, a shorter carbon-fibre driveshaft to reduced rotating mass and it sits 0.6 inches lower to pull the centre of gravity closer to the pavement.

Net result? A bump of 26 ponies to 332 at 7,000 rpm. Torque sits at 270 lb-ft at 5,200 rpm, a more modest increase, though 90 percent of that twist's available earlier and over a much broader range.

We wrung out the new 370Z on a drive from the Vegas Strip and up through the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, before an afternoon lapping at the wonderfully twisty Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch in Pahrump, Nevada.

As advertised, the newborn Z is noticeably stiffer and lighter on its feet. Wearing the larger four-wheel disc brakes from the Sport Package – four-piston front, two rear – you can dive deep into a corner before piling on the binders.

Corners is flat and fast: Nissan say the car's retained a near-perfect 54/46 front/rear weight balance. The standard tires are 18-inch Yokohamas, though we preferred the handsome 19-inch lightweight forged alloys, wrapped in sticky Bridgestone Potenza.

Shun us if you must, but on first blush, the Nissan's new suspension seems too taunt at times for its intended day-to-day use and the engine note inside the cabin is well, not much sexier than a Pathfinder's – hopefully a Nismo setup is coming down the pipe. The rack-and-pinion steering on the other hand is magic: firm and communicative as all sporting machines should be.

Exit a corner under full thrust and the standard limited slip differential and remapped stability control keep you pointed-downs-track – unless the latter's toggled off – then it's all up to the driver. By the by, the mass the gas off the line and the 370Z will hit 100 km/h in under five seconds.

We're in love with the Z's groundbreaking new SynchroRev Match, offered on six-speed manual cars wearing the Sport Package. A world-first, the system automatically blips the throttle when you brake, depress the clutch and downshift, delivering expert heel and toe action every single time.

You can shut down the system, but we

guarantee you'll never achieve downshifts this velvety or vocal on your own. It all aids in the Z's mantra of being a straight-forward, fast machine.

The new seven-speed automatic gearbox with standard paddle shifters has its own Downshift Rev Match system too – and gets better fuel economy versus the manual gearbox.

The redone interior of the '09 Z addresses what was arguably the weakest point of the old car. Comfort, materials and build quality are much improved – there's even a glove box now.

The trademark trio of dials atop the centre stack – oil pressure, voltmeter and clock – return and the main gauge cluster still adjusts in sync with the steering wheels. Too bad the digital multi-display on the left's hard to read at times.

The 370Z wears two different seats, the driver's being extra-bolstered to hold you tight during spirited driving. Both are heated and finished in leather and suede as standard.

The removal of the rear strut brace behind the seats (replaced with less intrusive hidden reinforcements) opens up more cargo room under the Z's hatch. Note, that sexy cantilevered roof does affect rear visibility to a degree.

On the safety and tech front, six airbags are standard, as is push-button start, an eight-speaker Bose stereo and Bluetooth connectivity.

Affordability has always been key to the Z's success and the new 2009 model has dropped a whopping ten grand to \$39,998 with a six-speed manual gearbox (\$41,498 for the slush-box). The only options are the before-mentioned \$4000 Sport Package, which also adds a front chin and rear spoiler, and a Navigation Package at \$2,500.

Evolution has made this the best Z on the books. Its outstanding performance for the dollar may even convert the Corvette, RX-8 and dare we say, Cayman, faithful. ✓



## 2009 NISSAN 370Z

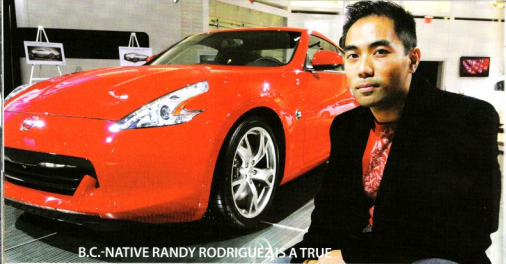
BASE PRICE	\$39,998
ENGINE	V6, 3.7-litres
VALVE TRAIN	DOHC, 24V
MAX HP @ RPM	332 @ 7000 rpm
MAX LB-FT @ RPM	270 @ 5200 rpm
TRANSMISSION	RWD, 6-spd manual RWD, 7-spd auto.
SUSPENSION	Front double wishbone w/ stabilizer bar; rear multi-link w/ stabilizer bar
BRAKES	Disc, Disc, VDC, TCS, BA, ABS, EBD
STEERING	Power rack-and-pinion
WHEELS	(f) 18 x 8; (r) 18 x 9 (std.) (f) 19 x 9; (r) 19 x 10 (opt.)
TIRES	(f) 225/50R18; (r) 245/45R18 (std.) (f) 245/40R19; (r) 275/35R19 (opt.)
LENGTH x WIDTH, MM (IN.)	4247 x 1849 (167.2 x 72.8)
WHEELBASE, MM (IN.)	2550 (100.4)
CURB WEIGHT, KG (LB.)	1487 (3278) (5M) 1503 (3314) (7M)
CITY/HWY/CLT/100-KM (MPG)	11.6/7.7 (24/37) (5M) 11.4/7.6 (23/37) (7M)
FUEL GRADE	Premium





**Affordability**  
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B.C.-NATIVE RANDY RODRIGUEZ IS A TRUE

# ZED HEAD

THE CANADIAN DESIGNER BEHIND THE NEW Z

By Bradley Horn

You'd think Nissan would have at least included Nuvavut White or Tory Blue in the new 370Z's colour palette — after all, their 31-year-old Canadian designer, Randy Rodriguez, is responsible for the striking styling of its new two-seat sports car.

Born in Surrey, B.C., Rodriguez grew up surrounded by automobiles at his father's service station. As a youngster, he fell hard for his brother's first car, a Datsun Z, fueling his passion for design and the iconic Japanese coupe — he's owned almost a dozen since.

Rodriguez graduated from Detroit's College for Creative Studies in 2002, and not surprisingly, Nissan's San Diego studios were his first choice for a gig. One of his first projects was the Actic concept from the 2004 Detroit show, which formed the basis for the Rogue sport ute.

Shortly after, Rodriguez got his dream assignment: designing the new generation Z. *World of Wheels* recently spoke with the up and coming Canadian:

**Quite a few designers vied to pen the new Z. Brag a bit. What made your design the winner?**

"It was a global competition between all the Nissan studios and pretty much everybody had a design. But I think because my first car was a Z and I've owned so many Zs, I just had an intrinsic feel for what the car is and its heritage. I heard that some of the older designers were like 'who's this guy?' There's a really strong Z feeling about all his sketches and designs... I really had a strong understanding of the car's DNA."

**So then, what makes for good sports car design?**

"I like things that are more aggressive, have a lot of form and surface. I like things to be

a little more sexy and have a really good stance, to look like they're powerful. When you were a kid those were the cars on your wall. Everybody had a Countach on their wall. You wish every car could be like that."

**You've owned 10 Zs now, what design lessons have you taken away from them?**

"The strongest Zs are the first generation and the last. I used those two cars as my initial inspiration. The 350Z was beautiful and an amazing design too, [but] if I was going to embody the Z, it would be something closer to the 240Z. I didn't try to do something retro. I tried something modern that had a little bit of the soul of the 240."

**What element of the design are you most proud of? Is there something you fought for?**

"There's a lot of cool details I'm really proud of. You have to fight for everything on a >

> car. It's like a battle, between other designers and engineers. You're competing with each other, but you're also working with each other. I'm really proud of the beltline, the main character line of the car. It's really shark-like... the car has a lot more motion, it's more dynamic and passionate. And also the DLO [Day Light Opening] referencing the 240Z a little more."

**Nissan wanted its new Z to be lighter and tighter. Was that a challenge for you?**

"It actually gave me more freedom... Nissan had the mindset of making this even more of a pure sports car, like the original 240. It's amazing that the car didn't get bigger, heavier and fatter — they went the opposite way, which is much harder to do. It has a shorter wheelbase, a wider track at the rear and it sits lower. These are all the things a designer would want and a what a real sports car enthusiast would want."

**How has the presence for the GT-R changed the design of the 370Z?**

"The GT-R is an amazing car performance-wise — it kicks ass. But it's a very different philosophy. There were some cues that we carried over, like the cantilevered roof, even though the 370 doesn't have the blacked out A-pillar, which I wish it did have. You can see some familiarity, but the Zs just done in a different way."

**Name some good designs outside of the automotive world?**

"I'm a huge motorcycle nut. I have an MV Agusta FX and I used that as inspiration for the Z and lots of other things I've done."

Ducati as well, Italian brands have a lot of art and sculpture in them."

**So what gives the Z staying power?**

"It just has no comparisons in terms of its balance of performance, stunning design and value. It's a super-affordable car that has technologies that should make it cost twice as much and it can hang with cars that cost twice as much or more. It looks good, has good quality and that's one of the reason why I love the car so much. I've had Zs with 300,000 miles on them and they're still running strong. When you have a car that doesn't let you down, you love it."

**What makes Japanese car design so unique?**

"When you go to Japan the culture is just insane. They're amazing people, very civilized. The technology is just so much more advanced and there's so many people crammed into a small place. It's a sort of visual overload. They're able to handle and express designs that are a little more complex. At the same time they're very functional and efficient with their spaces. They're spiritual people. Everybody takes their job seriously no matter what they do, even the janitor. I think all this comes through in their cars."

**What other automakers are doing good design work these days?**

"I'm not sure. I see stuff from certain manufacturers that I kind of like, but I always think about how I'd want to change that car... I would do this, this and this. I think Nissan is good in that each car has character and makes a bold statement. I wish other manufacturers would do the same. Some of them that have this super strong brand image where every car has the same theme, the same face and the same grill. I don't like that."

**If you weren't designing cars for Nissan, what would you be doing?**

"I've also done an airplane, which was awesome because unlike a sports car, when you say 'sport plane' you don't really conjure up anything. I had the opportunity at Nissan, though another company that contacted us, and my design was selected for the exterior. It's just a little two-seater, carbon fibre plane that has wings that fold up so you can trailer it home and stick it in your garage. It lands on water also. It's called the Icon A5. It's awesome... They even had ex-NASA guys working on it."

**So, do you have your personal Z yet?**

"No it's being made with love right now at our Japanese Nissan factory. I got a black one, but I'm regretting it a bit. It doesn't show the forms as much. I should have got a silver one. Everyday we work on silver cars, our models are all silver, so I wanted to see it in something else, so I tried black. It's only a one year lease, so I'll get a different colour next year! :)"

It just has no comparisons in terms of its **balance** of **performance**, **stunning design** and **value**.

