

GAME CHANGING

ORIGINAL



By Huw Evans

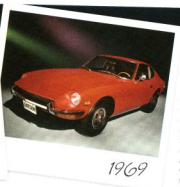
SOMETIMES A SINGLE CAR COMES ALONG THAT TOTALLY TRANSFORMS THE REPUTATION OF AN AUTOMAKER. IN 1969, THE DATSUN Z DID JUST THAT FOR NISSAN

One of the oldest car manufacturers in Japan, Nissan, originally called Kawishirosha Motor Works was founded in 1914 and its early cars were sold under the DAT name (created from original company founders Kenjiro Den, Rokuro Aoyama and Metaro Takeuchi). In 1930, due to a new government proposal which enabled mini cars, those with engines of 500cc less to be driven without a licence in Japan, a companion range of DAT-SON models were introduced (meaning literally son of DAT), though a couple of years later it was changed to Datsun and larger cars soon followed.

#### ROADSTERS FROM JAPAN

By the 1950s, Datsuns were quite popular in Japan and Nissan started looking to actively export them. In particular, North America, with its seemingly insatiable demand for automobiles, looked like a huge opportunity. Nissan Motor Corporation USA was set up in 1960 and the first two vehicles to make it to North America were a small pickup truck and four door sedan. However, in order to really make an impact in this new market, Yuzaka Katayama (then in charge of the company's US West Coast operations), believed that sports cars were the key, since Americans in particular had been

buying sizeable numbers of MGs, Triumphs and Austin-Healeys. Nissan started building sports roadsters in 1959, but it wasn't until the launch of the SP/SPL310 in 1962 that US buyers actually considered a Datsun as a real alternative to the British machines. A succession of more powerful and better equipped models followed, culminating in the SR/SRL-311 of 1967-70, but by that stage, traditional British style roadsters were looking increasingly like anachronisms and for the coming decade, something a lot more modern would be needed, if Nissan stood any chance of capturing a healthy slice of the affordable sporty car market. >



#### AMERICAN HIT

Enter the S30. Styled by Count Albrecht Goertz (of BMW 307 and Toyota 200GT fame), the S30 was a modern, two-door, two-seat hatchback coupe, powered by a smooth, single overhead cam 2.0-litre six-cylinder engine, rated at 150 hp and coupled to a five-speed manual gearbox. It was launched as the Datsun Fairlady Z in Japan in 1969 and a few months later, sales began in the crucial US market, where the car was badged as an early '70 model.

North American versions, dubbed Datsun 240Z, featured a bigger 2.4-litre six (initially rated at 150 hp and 148 lb of torque) coupled exclusively with a four-speed gearbox and sold like hotcakes. Clearly Katayama or Mr. K as he was affectionately known, was onto something. At a base price of \$3,526, the 240Z, with its short 90-inch wheelbase, light weight, modern

(and fully independent) MacPherson strut suspension, plus quick rack and pinion steering and peppy six-cylinder engine was, quite simply a hoot to drive and virtually matched the performance of cars like the Jaguar XK-E at almost half the price. However thanks to its modern engineering, lift-up rear hatch and high feature content, the Z was also a lot more reliable and practical.

In Japan Fairlady Zs were soon entered in racing events and Katayama also saw, as part of the car's North American marketing strategy that examples were campaigned in Sports Car Club of America events at the earliest opportunity. John Morton drove a 240 Z to great success, winning the SCCA's C-Production class in 1970 and another early stakwiart was Shelby racing legend Peter Brock, who took on and won against the mighty factory backed Porsches in

SCCA during 1970-71.

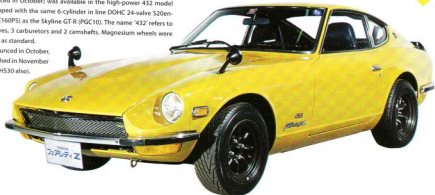
By then sales were really starting to take off in the US, helped by the arrival of a five-speed manual gearbox, plus the option of a three-speed automatic (considered crucial for North America), though interestingly enough, only 10 percent of buyers ordered it that first year. Minor changes saw all cars adopt a revised ventilation system with extractors on the C-pillars instead of the rear decklid. More significant was the introduction of the long nose Fairlady ZG in Japan (the G standing for Grande). Released in October 1971, this was designed to homologate the car for running in Japan's then Group 4 touring car class, though in a shrewd move, Katayama saw to it that the elongated nose clip was made available through North American dealers as an over the counter option, further enhancing the Zs already growing reputation as a serious performance car, on both street and track.

#### BEST SELLER

By the time the sales tallies were divided up, the 240 Z had outsold Chevrolet's prized Corvette in the US in 1971 and despite a worsening exchange rate between the US dollar and the Japanese Yen (which caused base prices to climb around \$200) North American deliveries of 240Zs almost doubled for 1972, by which stage the car had helped Datsun become the most

The first-generation Fairlady Z, launched in November 1969 (announced in October) was available in the high-power 432 model equipped with the same 6-cylinder in line DOHC 24-valve S20-engine (160PS) as the Skyline GT-R (PGC10). The name '432' refers to 4 valves, 3 carburetors and 2 camshafts. Magnesium wheels were fitted as standard.

Announced in October, launched in November (S30, HS30 also).



popular Japanese automobile brand in the US (Z sales representing some 10 percent of total volume in the New World).

By 1973 US Federal requirements were beginning to make an impact on the North American car market and as a result the 2.4-litre six was detuned to meet stricter smog requirements. In addition new net horsepower ratings, meant that on paper, the engine was down to 129 hp and bigger front bumper guards (to comply with a new 5 mph impact ruling) added weight, further compromising performance. Yet despite all this, the Z's popularity continued to grow and in the US, more than 46,000 of the little two-seaters were sold that model year.

In order to comply with even tighter emissions requirements and broaden market appeal, the 240Z was replaced by the 260Z for '74, which also added a companion 2+2 model. And although the Datsun Z would go on to become the best selling sports car of the 1970s the latter models, despite extra comfort, convenience and ultimately better performance, somehow lacked the purity and purpose of those very first 240s. Today the 240Z is recognized as the first and (particularly among western enthusiasts) the most collectible of all Japanese cars and for good reason. It's still remarkably fun to drive, great to look, easy to work on and enduringly popular, so much in fact that when Nissan decided to reintroduce the Z as a 2002 model it looked straight to those original two-seaters for inspiration. **!**

This No.5 car was driven by R. Aaltonen and J. Todd, coming in 3rd overall in the 41st Rallye Monte-Carlo in January 1972. The Rallye Monte-Carlo is often referred to as the "snow and ice rally", and it is accepted that FR cars are difficult to control, so when it came in 3rd this car was the center of attention for everyone around the world involved with rallying.

## Datsun 240z Facts & Figures

Length 4150 mm (1628-in)  
 Wheelbase 2504 mm (90.7-in)  
 Weight 1068 kg (2355 lbs)

Engine 2495-cc in-line six-cylinder  
 Construction Cast-iron block with alloy head  
 Valvetrain Single-overhead camshaft  
 Fuel system Twin Hitachi side-draft dual barrel carburetors

Transmission Five-speed manual 5-cylinder  
 Steering Rack & Pinion

Suspension Independent with front MacPherson struts, coil springs, tube shocks and anti roll bar; rear Chapman struts, lower A-arms coil springs and tube shocks

Brakes Front disc, rear drum with fixed hubs  
 Wheels 4.5 J x 14-in  
 Tires 175SR14

Performance 0-60 mph 8.0 seconds  
 Top speed 124 mph  
 Fuel mileage 11.1 per 100 km (21 mpg)

Base Price\* 5526 (1970)  
 5696 (1971)  
 4106 (1972)  
 4600 (1973)

Production 1970 16,215  
 1971 26,733  
 1972 45,588  
 1973 46,282

\*Refers to US models Current value (\$3,500-\$22,000)

