



## THE ICONIC NISSAN Z TURNS 50

With its distinctive curves and seductive purr, it's easy to spot a Nissan Z in a crowd of cars. The iconic design of the two-door coupe, combined with impressive handling and power and topped with an affordable price tag, means that even after almost 50 years, the Nissan Z remains one of the most popular sports cars of all time. When they dreamed up the first Z, Nissan's aim (known as Datsun at the time) was to produce a good-looking, well-performing sports car that offered exceptional value for money - and that's exactly what they did when they released the 240Z in 1969.

The 240Z quickly gained a reputation as a very reliable, stylish sports car that boasted plenty of power (151hp to be exact) and excellent performance for a fraction of the price of the comparable Porsche 911, which, ironically, actually had less horsepower at the time. It had a 2.4 litre engine that could achieve a top speed of 200km/h, and came as a 4-speed manual transmission or 3-speed automatic. Five years later, Nissan released the 260z with small changes, thanks to new emissions regulations, which meant despite a bigger engine (now a 2.6 litre, hence the name), output was lowered to 140hp.

The 280Z followed just a year later in 1975, now, as you might have guessed, powered by a 2.8 litre engine. The transmission was also updated to 5-speed – a welcome change, as was the increase in power to 149hp. Nissan upped their game in 1979 with a second generation of Z cars, starting with the 280ZX, which was touted as being more luxurious than its predecessors (think climate control, leather seats, two-toned paint and gold-alloy wheels). Although there was concern that the emphasis on luxury and aesthetics meant that performance was no longer a priority, the 280ZX sold exceptionally well.

The 1980s saw a complete redesign of the Z, and Datsun now became known as Nissan. Gone was the timeless Z shape, replaced by a boxier, wedge-shaped body and decidedly cool pop-up headlights when the 300ZX was released in 1984. The theme of luxury continued with arguably gimmicky features, like seats that vibrated along to the music (Duran Duran, anyone?). Although a few eyebrows were raised over the redesign – many will agree that the 300ZX wasn't nearly as attractive as the original Zs – the car offered an impressive and powerful 3L V6 engine with 164hp.

The 300ZX got a face lift in 1990; its lines were softened and its performance and handling were drastically improved. Although it was now heavier, the extra weight hardly mattered with an output of 220hp. The twin turbo version was a hit (with a whopping 300hp) and won Motor Trends' "Import Car of the Year". They were priced high though, and while they performed well enough to justify the price tag, people simply weren't willing to hand over the cash. In fact, in its final year of production in 1998, Nissan only managed to sell a dismal 289 units of the 300ZXs. With Nissan setting their sights on 'bigger and better' things, it looked like the beloved Z had run its course.

That is, until the 350Z. Nissan soon realised that without its 'halo' car, they were just another "faceless corporation ... just a maker of sedans", as Jerry Hirshberg, Nissan's former design chief, pointed out. Soon enough, Nissan began to dream up a new Z – it would be an inviting balance of modern and retro, its timeless shape paying tribute to the legendary 240Z. In 2003, the 350Z was launched with a 287hp V6 engine, 6-speed manual transmission, independent suspension with 17-inch wheels, and of course its iconic 'Z-ness' – all for a reasonable \$26,289 – and that's just the base model.

Effortlessly swift on straights and crisp around corners, with firm suspension and a comfy yet sporty interior, it's no wonder that the 350Z is credited with saving the future of Nissan. In fact, it was one of the most popular sports cars in Australia up until its last year of production in 2009.

Nissan released the 370Z that same year – similar in looks, only smaller, lighter, faster and curvier, with a larger, more powerful engine. Thanks to its shorter wheel base and length, wider body and lower height, the 370Z handles beautifully and feels like a true race car. With the 2018 Heritage version revealed earlier this year and whispers of a new edition in the near future, it's safe to say that the Z isn't disappearing anytime soon.

*Article by Janie Medbury*

