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Just Z Facts

By Dan Banks

Editor's Note:

Dan Banks is a Datsun/Nissan sports car enthusiast, a member of the ZCCA, and the northern Virginia chapter of that Club. In addition, Andrea and Dan are relatively new members of the Chesapeake Region. Dan has written several articles as the Z Club Historian. The following material is excerpted from on of Dan's book reviews.

Well, here we are in late January (article originally written during winter 2002 for ZCCNV, and updated). Many of us have put our Z's up in the garage. Thoughts arise of settling into the old easy chair with a cup of hot cocoa as the snow flies outside and reading about Z cars.

The topic of my article today: John Bell Rae's 1982 book "NISSAN/DATSUN; A History of Nissan Motor Corporation in the U.S.A., 1960 – 1980" McGraw Hill 1982. For those interested in a well written, United States-centered account of Datsun and its parent Nissan, Rae's book presents a definitive history.

Chapter 14, "RACING, RALLIES, AND SPORTS CARS" contains a wealth of information, especially on the Z car from its introduction through 1980. Following is the statement then NMC-USA President Yutaka Katayama made upon the release of the brand new 240Z for the American market.

"With the introduction of the Datsun 240-Z, Nissan will have enjoyed the accomplishment of covering the American market from the Pickup to the Personal Sports Car."

"We are proud to have been able to cover all purposes of motor car use, and for our Datsun dealer network,

the new 240-Z affords an opportunity to create an exciting new image."

"240-Z represents the imaginative spirit of Nissan, and was designed to please a demanding taste that is strictly American. It meets all the requirements of sports minded drivers, fulfilling their desire for superb

styling, power, and safety and providing them with the most thrilling and enjoyable ride available in any car".

"Our new product reflects the rapid advancement of our company, and its development will be unique in automobile history. We have studied the memorable artistry of European coachmakers and engine

builders and combined our knowledge with Japanese craftsmanship. The result is an exotic, high performance car exclusively for America. It will be the beginning of a new romance for true car lovers who believe that motoring is more than just a commute."

"We adopt this new 240-Z as an aggressive innovation in automobile building and take pride in having been totally responsible for its concept."

"Nissan offers this spirited car with affection – its heart is Japan and its soul is America."

Soon after its 1970 introduction, and with the 1958 automobile magazines originating coverage of the Datsun automobile only 12 years earlier, the Datsun 240-Z became a media favorite. Road and Track magazine, in 1971, named the Datsun 240Z one of the 10 Best Cars In The World, and the Best Sports/GT,

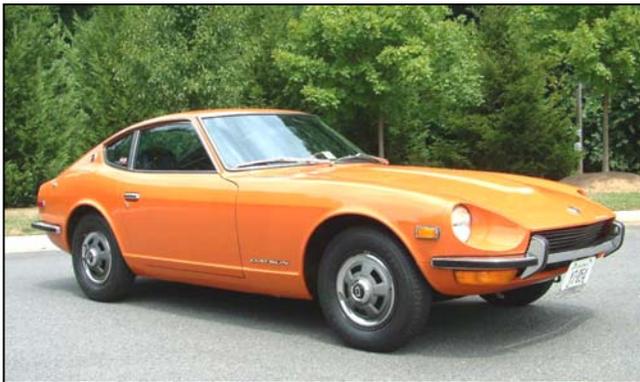
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Just Z Facts - continued

\$3500 - \$4000. The following paragraph appears by a photo of the Datsun 240Z on page 35 of the August 1971 issue of Road and Track:

“The DATSUN 240Z is such a remarkable car relative to its price that it has become nearly mythical. Yes, it really is a handsome, exciting, 2-seater GT coupe with a single-overhead-cam 6-cyl engine of 150 horsepower, a nice 4-speed gearbox, independent suspension all around, good finish, good brakes, an impressive list of standard equipment and a list price of under \$3600. We are aware it is not a perfect car. All things considered, with its fine combination of performance, comfort and sportiness it must be considered one of the most significant automobiles in the history of sports motoring.”



Banks' 1971 Datsun 240 Z

When Rae's book went to print in 1981 over 500,000 Z cars had been built, shipped, and sold in America. As Rae noted, a 1976 Datsun B-210 became the 2 millionth vehicle sold in the United States over a 17-year period that began from a standing start in 1960.



Banks' '71 Z Engine Compartment

Here is another 17-year statistic Nissan can be proud of. On October 30, 1980 Nissan announced that they would build their first American factory in Smyrna, Tennessee as a sister to their Zama plant in Japan. Groundbreaking took place on February 3, 1981, and the first vehicle, a compact pick up truck, rolled off the line at Smyrna on June 16, 1983.

Smyrna was formally dedicated on October 21, 1983. 17 years later, on November 27, 2000, a yellow 2001 Nissan Supercharged Frontier 4X4 Crew Cab rolled off the line at Smyrna, the 5 millionth vehicle Smyrna had manufactured in the United States. In 2003 Nissan's 2.6 million square foot plant in Canton, Mississippi opened making the combined United States' capacity of Smyrna, Nissan's Decherd, Tennessee engine plant, and the Canton, Mississippi plant will be 1,000,000 vehicles per year.



Banks' Z From the Rear

Finally, my Z saw its shadow the same day as some rodent in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania named “Phil.” (Those creatures bite, you know...) My interpretation, however, is that springtime Z car driving weather is due to arrive any day now. Let the groundhog wait another 6 weeks... I ain't!



Andrea and Dan with the Z at a show