

1970 Datsun 240Z

You've got to question the sanity of Datsun U.S.A when they launched the 1970 240Z. American performance enthusiasts were accustomed to buying muscular looking factory hot rods powered by 400 plus horsepower and sported bolding hoods and spoilers in the rear. The 240Z had nothing in common with what the Big Three were offering. Yet by the end of the model year, the two-seat fastback hit a nerve with the buying public and had acquired a legion of admirers from coast to coast.

The "Z", as it was known, wasn't your typical American car. Designed by Yoshihiko Matsuo, head of Datsun's Sports Car Styling Studio, the "Z" sat about eight inches shorter than a Chevy Vega, was slightly lower than a Barracuda and weighted 1,000 lbs. less than a Corvette. While not earthshaking in design, the sleek body style was modern with a touch of European flair. The long front end included headlamps that were neatly tucked away in a recessed cove. A thin bumper wrapped around the fenders and an attractive black rectangle grille filled in the area between the headlamps. A buldge in the center of the hood suggested a performance engine was resting under it. The fastback design was certainly aerodynamic. A stamped horizontal feature line increased the perceived length from the side. In the rear, the lift-up hatch allowed access for luggage.

The cockpit was spacious, yet all business. A large faced speedometer and tachometer were positioned directly in front of the driver. Oil pressure, water temperature, fuel and amp gauges rested in molded pods located in the center of the dash. Both the steering wheel and shift knob were made of wood. Bucket seats were covered with vinyl and included adjustable head rests. Three anchor seat belts and a collapsible steering wheel kept the occupant safe.

Its suspension system gave lively handling. Many front suspension components were borrowed from the upscale Datsun 1880 sedan and included rack and pinion steering. The stamped lower control arms were connected to a lateral subframe that was attached to the main body structure. MacPherson struts with coil springs kept bouncing from getting out of hand. The rear suspension was unique and first to be tried on any Datsun. The system, called the Chapman strut, was similar to a MacPherson strut except

that it didn't allow the wheels to turn. It consisted of "A" type lower control arms, upper struts and coil springs.

Power was derived from a 146 cubic-inch single overhead camshaft 6-cylinder engine that was canted 5 degrees to the right. While not the powerhouse of domestic muscle cars, the stout little engine produced 150 horsepower, more than one horsepower per cubic-inch. The compression ratio was a modest 9.0:1. Twin Hitachi S.U. side-draft carburetors brought the air/fuel mixture into the combustion chamber. The high-revving engine could propel the "Z" through the quarter mile in a shade over 16 seconds. With an automatic transmission not available until 1971, buyers had to make due with a four-speed manual transmission only.

The 1970 240Z proved to be a success. It was clear the Japanese had been thinking out of the box. While American car companies were focused on tire melting performance only, Datsun engineered a car with a unique combination of good performance, excellent stopping and handling capabilities wrapped up in a handsome exterior package, and all at an affordable price.