

CARGAZING

For the Enthusiasts

New 2023 Z Shows Nissan Hasn't Forgotten People Who Love to Drive

By Derek Price
CARGAZING.COM

Over the past decade, Nissan hasn't given car enthusiasts many reasons to celebrate.

Sure, small crossovers like the Rogue and Kicks have helped the company's bottom line, and installing continuously variable transmissions across the lineup has improved gas mileage.

But where's the fun in that?

Even Nissan's spectacular all-conquering halo car, the GT-R, was allowed to wither on the vine with few updates over the past decade, getting so pricey and long in the tooth that there are questions about whether it's going to stick around for another generation.

All those sins can be forgiven after a drive in the new Z.

For 2023, Nissan gives its iconic affordable sports car a thorough update that drops the 370Z's numerals while adding a whole lot of style, power and charm.

The 2023 Z is a stunningly beautiful car, something confirmed every time I stopped for gas or pulled into a parking lot during my weeklong test drive. People want to talk about it, gaze at it and lust for it.

It has the sleek, modern shape of a thoroughly contemporary sports car, but it



Nissan's affordable sports car, now simply named the Z, has been redesigned for 2023. It has a fresh look with more than a nod to its storied past.

also pays homage to the Z's rich heritage. To my eyes, it's a perfect blend of the fresh and the timeless, a difficult mix to get right.

The front end is reminiscent of the classic 240Z, a car that's commanding obscene prices in recent auctions at least in part because it's so breathtakingly pretty.

Its rear end looks more like the 300ZX, one of the best-looking cars to come out of the 1990s.

Decades from now, when people wax nostalgic about the most beautiful cars of the 2020s, this one is surely going to be on the list.

Even better, it has performance to back up the sexy body.

A 400-horsepower, 3.0-liter, twin-turbocharged V6 delivers smooth, muscular

power to the rear wheels along with a delicious exhaust note, one that sounds sporty without ever crossing the line into brash or annoying.

The steering and suspension fall into that same wonderful category, delivering fun and precision when you want it but also enough smoothness that long highway trips don't feel like a slog. It's cozy but comfortable.

Best of all, at least from the enthusiast's standpoint, you can get it with something God intends for every sports car: a manual transmission.

The shift-it-yourself Z isn't perfect — my tester was a little fussy going into fifth gear — but it is far, far better than the blasphemy of automatics. Nissan deserves

serious kudos for keeping manual transmissions alive at a time when they seem like an endangered species.

Put it all together, and the new Z gives me an impression that's sure to be controversial: it's a whole lot better than the GT-R.

It's not even a close race in my mind. The GT-R is faster, obviously, but also a lot more intimidating to drive. Even if a driver has the skill and guts to handle a GT-R at its limits — which I don't — you can't come close to pushing those limits on public roads without risking jail time. It's more frightening than it is fun.

In contrast, this new Z is plenty quick but also playful as a puppy. It's approachable and friendly, a car that makes you want to take the long route home just for the

sheer joy of driving it.

To me, that's the sign of a great sports car. There are precious few exceptional ones, and the 2023 Z makes the list.

When it comes to pricing, there's good news and bad news.

On the positive side, Nissan has priced the new Z extremely well, starting under \$40,000. I think that's an almost unbelievable bargain for the power, features and style it delivers.

The bad news is that Nissan dealers know that, too, and are likely to expect buyers to pay well over MSRP for it, at least in the short term. When supply is low and demand is high, capitalists turn into extortionists.

Fortunately for those dealers, the new Z hits all the right notes to fire up enthusiasm and open checkbooks. While other companies are abandoning affordable sports cars in favor of dull crossovers and government-mandated EVs, some folks at Nissan are still carrying the sports-car banner and doing the job right.

To the people inside Nissan who created this machine, and especially those who made sure the six-speed manual was a part of the package, we enthusiasts notice. And we salute you.

AT A GLANCE

What was tested? 2023 Nissan Z Performance M/T (\$49,900). Options: Premium two-tone paint (\$1,295), floor mat package (\$400), illuminated kick plate (\$500), interior accent lighting (\$445). Price as tested (including \$1,025 destination charge): \$53,655

Wheelbase: 100.4 in.

Length: 172.4 in.

Width: 72.6 in.

Height: 51.8 in.

Powertrain: 3.0-liter twin turbocharged V6 (400 hp, 350 lbs.-ft.)

Transmission: Six-speed manual

Fuel economy: 18 city, 24 highway

RATINGS

Style: 10

Performance: 10

Price: 10

Handling: 10

Ride: 8

Comfort: 7

Quality: 7

Overall: 9

Why buy it?

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The new Z's cabin is cozy but comfortable. A compliant ride makes it enjoyable as a daily driver.

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A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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