

On the 35th Anniversary of Z car.

This is to send my heartiest greetings for the coming New Year 2005, which will be the 35th anniversary for DATSUN 240Z. As a person deeply involved with the development and marketing of 240Z, and subsequent Z cars, I have the following message to all the Z enthusiasts.

When Nissan first started mass producing automobiles, its purpose was not only to provide a convenient means of transportation to the people of Japan and for the development of Japanese industry but also to provide a swift and comfortable means of sports in place of horseback riding.

Nissan's first mass production started, therefore, with DATSUN. Although sedans were produced first, there were not enough licensed drivers who would patronize such sedans. The first DATSUNs were then converted, reluctantly, to pick up trucks by replacing the rear passenger seats with cargo boxes. The DATSUN trucks provided light and safe transportation then much needed in and around cities. The success of DATSUN trucks paved the way to have broad acceptance of DATSUNs for passenger transportation in the following years. In the 70 years since such humble beginning, NISSAN has grown to a producer of World's finest automobile in quality and quantity.

Yoshisuke Ayukawa, the founder, included in the production line such cars as roadster, coupe and phaeton among sedans although he was uncertain of the market in Japan. Ayukawa's intention was to demonstrate Nissan technology to the World by producing sports cars for sports enthusiasts with advanced technology. For Ayukawa, sports car was the flagship of Nissan.

In 1936 two DATSUN racers were produced under secrecy in order to participate in the first automobile race in Japan. I still remember vividly that a corner of the factory floor was blocked off with a tent and a sacred rope where the racers were carefully tuned for the race. The cars performed well in the first Japanese automobile race, but they were destroyed in the subsequent war and only photos show their existence.

The years after the Second World War were hard recovering time for Japan and sports car, let alone its production, was driven out of people's mind. I was, however, invited by the officers' Sports Car Club of the U.S. occupation force to participate, and then to lead,

the Sports Car Club of Japan soon afterwards. I began to realize the importance of sports car in the automobile industry again and remembered the intent of Ayukawa to make sports cars as the flagship of Nissan. By the time of the first Tokyo Motor Show in 1952, I had a sports car body attached to a DATSUN truck chassis and produced the first sport model after the war for Nissan. This was largely my private project as the Advertising Manager of Nissan at the time. This car was later officially called DC3 DATSUN SPORTS. One of the first production models is still proudly shown in the entrance hall of Nissan today.

In 1958, I participated in the Australian Mobil Gas Endurance Trial with DATSUN 210s as Nissan's team manager. The endurance rally took 19 grueling days around Australia from Sydney to Melbourne for 100,000 miles. Two DATSUN 210s fought well and won the first two places in the class. The news literally went around the world for Japanese car's first international victory. This also had the effect of imprinting in the mind of Nissan management the importance of automobile sports in the future market. The company held celebration throughout the subsequent year to commemorate this victory.

In 1960, I was assigned to the U.S. for the purpose of market research. It was my strong impression that to talk about cars, it was imperative to talk about the sports performance of the car. While gathering the market information I began to realize that Nissan could not rely on trading companies to export its products to the U.S. I got back the marketing rights from the trading company and talked Nissan into establishing its own sales company in the U.S. Although this was successful, I had no experience of selling cars anywhere. When starting to sell cars in the U.S. my mind was set on sports cars. All cars that I sold were for sports minded people in everyday life. I was getting ready to have a real sports car produced by Nissan.

With the combination of good luck and hard work of Nissan engineers and designers, 240 Z reached the production line in 1970. I wanted the car to have a beautiful rear view and be affordable to young professional people just out of college. I was not at all irritated when the car was called "Poor man's Porsche" or "Poor man's Jaguar". I knew I was providing first class sports car performance at an affordable price. Nissan first forced me to put the name Fairlady to the car, but I insisted with 240Z, a simple but unforgettable name, and it still survives after 35 years of its introduction.

In 1996, Nissan stopped the production of Z. Nissan U.S.A., in order to respond to the demand, bought used Zs and completely re-worked on the cars and sold as new Zs. This had the great effect on keeping Z car fans together, and many of them were exported back to Japan by Japanese Z-car fans. These and the re-birth of 350Z was made possible by the great loyalty and demand shown by Z-car fans all over the world. The Z-car convention held throughout the U.S. states each year now counts 17 and expanding every year.

In 1999 Carlos Ghosn became the president of Nissan Motor and took drastic measures to revive the dying company, and Nissan miraculously came back in two years. Mr. Ghosn immediately understood the meaning of a sports car to the Nissan heritage and he decided to re-establish the Z as the flagship of Nissan.

The 350Z unveiled in 2002 has added new generation of customers young and old and the car is showing strong presence in the sports car racing scene all over the world. The intentions and dreams of Ayukawa who found Nissan 70 years ago are just as timely and fitting today. As a person who worked with Ayukawa at the beginning and later helped sell DATSUNs to the US market, I have no way to express how grateful I am.

We no longer can afford to keep horses at home. Instead, we have sports cars. We can experience with a sports car the sensation of oneness with the car, recreating the finest in equestrian riding, no rider on top, or no horse under the saddle. And in running the public road, a driver should use the utmost in modern technology in the sports car to go safe and easy, as the cavalier of the past did with pride.

Sports car is the modern horse that a driver should drive with his heartbeat in harmony with its exhaust notes.

A Happy New Year to all!

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