

NISMO loaded with full tank of adrenaline

by *Mark_Maynard*

Tingles run up the back of the neck and down the arms with a twist of the ignition on the NISMO 350Z. A driver might think gloves are needed to coolly handle one of the most relevant sports cars in the 21st century.

RACE-READY - The NISMO 350Z has the same power as the stock model but a much stiffer body, suspension and an outrageous body kit. CNS Photo. Large diameter dual exhaust pipes let out a familiar, raspy howl that has identified the high-strung Z car since the 1970s. You want retro in your sports car? This is it. The signature engine wail and exhaust note has been unmistakable since the Z model debuted in October 1969.

The NISMO 350Z is the fifth Z model, dialed-in, race-ready but street-savvy for \$38,695 complete. NISMO, or Nissan Motorsports, is the company's high-performance line of aftermarket parts. Upgrades are more than bolt-on cosmetics. And all components are covered by a factory warranty.

This package provides a level of performance more taut than the Enthusiast Z, but is just six pounds heavier.

The body has been stiffened with additional welds where the roof joins the windshield and the back glass. There are reinforcements in the engine compartment and the deck plus front and rear body dampers to absorb vibration and enhance steering feel. Progressive spring rates are 35 percent stiffer than stock.

Ride quality is race-car tight, but the upgrades are well-dampened to blunt harshness and impacts, though rough roads can give occupants a beating.

Exterior modifications include a reshaped grille opening for better airflow, a front chin spoiler to reduce lift

and an extended fascia for downforce. The rear end is the most outrageous with a spoiler, functional underbody diffuser and a big wing for downforce.

The wheels are lightweight, forged aluminum - 18 inches in front and 19 inches rear - with ultra-high-performance Bridgestone Potenza RE050A tires.

Horsepower is the same as the stock 350Z - 306 from the 3.5-liter V-6. The 268 foot-pounds of torque peaks at 4,800 rpm, but more than 90 percent is pulling strong between 2,000 and 7,000 rpm, same as stock. Engine features include variable exhaust cam timing, a 7,500 rpm rev limit and a symmetric twin ram air intake system.

Gears are just a wrist-flick apart in the close-ratio six-speed manual transmission, the only box offered. Clutch stiffness isn't wearing in stop-and-go traffic and there's satisfaction in clicking off well-timed shifts. Traction control and a viscous limited-slip differential come with the package.

The interior is set off with black cloth seats with red inserts, red stitching throughout the interior, a white-face tachometer (though the orange lettering washes out in bright sun) and the car's build number on an etched-aluminum plaque on the center console.

The parts are well-integrated. Nothing scrapes when you pull into driveways or dive across intersections.

The NISMO Z feels like a supercar without the super price.

SPECS

2007 Nissan NISMO 350Z

Body style: mid-mounted front-engine, rear-wheel-drive two-passenger coupe

Engine: aluminum, 24-valve DOHC 3.5-liter V-6

Horsepower: 306 at 6,800 rpm

Torque: 268 foot-pounds at 4,800 rpm

Transmission: six-speed manual

Fuel economy: 20 mpg city, 27 highway; 91 octane

Curb weight: 3,352 pounds

NISMO upgrades include:

Brembo vented disc brakes with four-caliper pistons front, two rear; 12.8-inch discs front, 12.7-inch rear; sport-tuned suspension; chassis-weld enhancements; body dampers front and rear; two-piece, lightweight alloy wheels in gunmetal gray with Bridgestone Potenza RE050A tires, 245/40R 18-inch front, 19-inch rear; tuned dual exhaust with chrome tips

Aerodynamics package, including front fascia with chin spoiler, side skirts, rear fascia with diffuser and rear wing

Black cloth seats with red inserts

Red stitching throughout the interior

White-faced tachometer

Serialized NISMO-etched aluminum plaque on center console

Color choices: red, black, silver, white

Standard equipment includes: remote locking, automatic temperature control, aluminum pedals, power windows-locks, bi-xenon headlights and LED taillights, lockable luggage box behind passenger seat

Safety equipment includes: front, side and curtain air bags; seat belt pretensioners and load limiters; tire-pressure monitoring system; 4-wheel ABS with electronic brake force distribution and brake assist

PRICING

Base: \$38,695, including \$625 freight charge

Options on test car: Nismo floor mats, \$80

Where assembled: Tochigi, Japan Diesel-powered Maxima by 2010

By Mark Maynard

Nissan will sell a diesel-powered Maxima sedan in the U.S. in 2010.

The Alliance engine will be co-developed with Renault and will clear U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Tier II Bin 5 emissions requirements.

Nissan already sells vehicles in Europe with clean diesel engines that also can run on biodiesel blends.

During the first half of fiscal year 2007, Nissan introduced the Euro four-compliant, 2-liter-class diesel engine in Europe. By fiscal year 2010, Nissan will launch vehicles with clean diesel engines in Japan, the United States and China, said Carlos Ghosn, president and CEO of Nissan Motor Co.

Details about the car, including its launch date, will be announced later.

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