



DATSUN 240Z: The newest GT

And a bargain too. Who else offers a GT coupe with 2.4-liter sohc 6-cyl engine and all-independent suspension for \$3500?

BY RON WAKEFIELD, Engineering Editor

LOOK AT THE specifications on pages 12-15. In them you'll find quite a few nice, compact imported GT coupes. You'll also find among them high prices (when you shop), small engines, unsophisticated chassis or various combinations thereof. Going alphabetically we find such as the Alfa Romeo 1750 GTV (2+2, 1779 cc, 132 bhp, 5-speed, live axle rear suspension, \$4500); Fiat 124 Sports Coupe (2+2, 1438 cc, 96 bhp, 4-speed, live axle, \$3000); Jaguar E-type Coupe (2 seats, 4235 cc, 246 bhp, 4-speed, independent rear, \$5800); Mercedes-Benz 280SL Coupe (2 seats, 2778 cc, 180 bhp, 4-speed, independent rear, \$7000); MGB GT (2+2, 1798 cc, 92 bhp, 4-speed, live axle, \$3300); Opel GT (2 seats, 1897 cc, 102 bhp, 4-speed, live axle, \$3500); Porsche 911T (2+2, 2195 cc, 142 bhp, 4-speed, independent rear, \$6000); Triumph GT6+ (2 seats, 1998 cc, 95 bhp, 4-speed, independent rear, \$3000); the Volvo 1808E (2 seats, 1986 cc, 130 bhp, 4-speed + OD, live axle, \$4500). All good cars. But do you see any bargains there? Maybe the Triumph—maybe—but all the rest seem high-priced for what you're getting, by American standards. Compare, for instance, America's one sports car, the Corvette: 2 seats, 5735 cc, 300 bhp, 4-speed, independent rear and a gob of gadgets, \$5100. A bargain, if you like a big, flashy car. And it seems that a good many Americans do.

For years I've said that it is possible to build a small GT with a generous-size engine, fully independent suspension, disc brakes, 4- or 5-speed gearbox and decent trim and fittings for well under \$4000. All it would take, I reasoned, was a manufacturer with some appropriate parts on his shelves and the vision to tool up for enough production to pare the unit cost. An American company could do it; using one of the 6-cyl engines or even a "small" V-8 from their smaller sedans and the front suspension from same, they could build an independent rear suspension and an exclusive body with simple equipment and meet that sort of price target if the car were produced in quantities of, say, 50,000 per year. It's more difficult to envision a European maker doing it: they always think in terms of small-displacement engines, which immediately puts a damper on U.S. sales, and their GT cars tend to be premium items even in their home markets. The British have larger-displacement engines but lack the vision to invest capital in such a project. It was left to the Japanese, and somehow we knew a long time ago that they would do it. They did.

The car is the Datsun 240Z. The parts on the shelves were the 510 sedan engine and the 1800 Laurel (a sedan not imported to the U.S.) front suspension. From there the 240Z is an entirely new car, unique from other Datsuns. It's going to sell for about \$3500 in the U.S. (Datsun U.S.A. hopes) quantities of 1600 per month once production is in full swing.

Before anyone jumps to the conclusion that the 240Z's engine is a 1595-cc 4-cyl, let us hasten to add that it's actually a 2393-cc, 6-cyl unit derived from the 510 engine's reciprocating parts.

Body and Chassis

THE 240Z's body and chassis platform is a conventional unitized, all-steel structure whose rigidity is derived almost totally from the welded-together unit from the firewall back. Seating is for two only: the area behind the seats is a flat floor covering for luggage and under that is the spare tire and the fuel tank.

The wheelbase is 90.7 in., just 0.3 in. shorter than the MGB and 1.4 greater than that of the Porsche 911, and with an overall length of 162.8 in., the 240Z is 9.4 in. longer than the MGB and 1.1 in. shorter than the 2+2 911. So it is not particularly efficient in terms of fore-aft seating room relative to its overall length. Considerable wasted space ahead of the radiator for the sake of styling, and the long engine, account for this. It is 4.1 in. wider than the MG and 0.7 wider than the Porsche, and at 50.6 in. high is 0.8 in. taller than the MG

and 1.4 in. lower than the Porsche. The track dimensions, 53.3 in. front and 53.0 rear, are much closer to those of the Porsche than the MG but it appears that there is plenty of room in the wheel wells for wheels with greater offset, which would increase the track further and improve the car's appearance.

Body appointments are on a par with other GTs in the same price class but is more up-to-date in appearance than most of them. True to current fashion there are no door ventwings—we hope that Datsun has solved the potential draft problem in the coupe better than they did in the 510—and the rear quarter windows are fixed. Flow-through exits are located under the rear window in the lift-up tailgate, the fresh air entering through flush cowl intakes and outlets in the center and at both ends of the molded and padded vinyl dash panel. Ventilation, even through the end vents, can be assisted by a 3-speed blower and there are the usual horizontal-moving levers for directing air to feet or windshield and controlling temperature.

Some of the standard equipment items are impressive. For instance, an AM radio with electrically powered antenna is standard (stereo, with speakers in the rear quarters, is optional) and a real wood steering wheel sets off an otherwise stark (if modern) interior. Carpeting is standard, as is an electrically heated rear window. Round, white-on-black instruments are set into molded hoods in the dash and controls are distributed among the dash, central console and a steering-column stalk in such a way that they can be operated without looking at them. The standard seats, which have the head restraints built in as extensions of their backs, have backs adjustable about 10 degrees but a 59-degree range is optional.

The front suspension parts are taken from the Datsun 1800 sedan, a stretched and more luxurious car based on the 510. A lateral subframe, mounted to the main structure with rubber isolation, carries pivots for the stamped lower suspension arms which, with the long MacPherson struts that angle up to their towers atop the wheel wells, determine the front wheels' camber characteristics. Rubber-mounted struts go forward from the underbody to the outboard ends of the lower arms, thereby taking braking loads and allowing fore-aft compliance as the front wheels hit bumps or dips. The coil springs are located near the top of the MacPherson struts and the shock absorbers at the bottom; a link-type anti-roll bar connected to the lower arms is standard.

Rear suspension is unique to the 240Z and is a departure from any previous Datsun practice. It is reminiscent of the Lotus Elan's independent rear suspension, though made from less expensive and weight-saving pieces, so we have taken the liberty of labeling it Chapman strut. Location of the wheels is the same as at the front: a very wide-based lower A-arm does the job of the front's lateral arm and compliance strut, and vertical struts (again including the coil spring and telescopic shock) angle upward to towers that protrude into the luggage area. Two constant-velocity universal joints and a ball-bearing spline are necessary in each axle halfshaft to accommodate the wheel movement. Mounting of the components to the underbody is most interesting: at the front a conventional-looking stamped cross-member bridging the driveshaft tunnel provides the front pivot for the A-arms and supports the differential nose. At its rear the differential is hung from a rather fragile-looking piece of sheet steel that goes sideways to rubber isolation mounts which fix it to the structure. Then, to the bottom side of a frame crossmember behind the differential, bolts another flat sheet steel brace that hangs straight down to form the rear pivot points for the A-arms. The whole support arrangement has a flimsy look about it but I'm willing to be persuaded that it really does the job—it must be fabulously inexpensive to produce!

Girling-type disc brakes are used at the front: solid discs of 10.7-in. diameter with single calipers. These discs are of smaller diameter than those of the 2000 sports car (10.7