

# IMPROVING UPON PERFECTION

Some might say that Datsun's 1970s Z cars were aesthetically perfect. But not Jay McToldridge – he's pulled this desirable classic out of the past and brought its looks right up to date...

Words: Daniel Bevis Photos: Chris Frosin

The mark of a truly great piece of car design is when the form seems to transcend the ages, never really becoming dated. Take the S30-generation Datsuns of the 1970s – sold in Japan as the Fairlady Z, and elsewhere in the world as the 240Z, 260Z and 280Z. While the engineering beneath the skin was both exquisitely crafted and forward-thinking (including such fabulous luxuries as rack-and-pinion steering, all-independent suspension and impressively large disc brakes), it's the body that's always made onlookers swoon. When the original E-Type-aping Z car appeared back in 1969, it won the hearts of many – and it's been breaking hearts ever since.

Let's not get carried away with the legend of the Zed, however. While the car is almost unimpeachably glorious in its design, that doesn't mean it's untouchable. The world has moved on, we have almost fifty years of automotive evolution to factor in, and these iconic cars aren't exactly gold dust; they're rare, sure, but not so rare that it's considered sacrilege to modify them. And with this in mind, Jay McToldridge saunters into the conversation, ready to demonstrate in very real terms just how wonderful the Z can become with the gentle application of the technologically advanced.

Some of you may recognise the name; JayMac is the figurative and literal driving force behind the Players Shows, collecting the finest modified metal from the UK and beyond into a series of top-flight events every year, and it stands to reason that he'd know a thing or two

about building scene-stealing cars. His Mk1 Golf has been making waves on the old-school stance scene for a few years now, although retro Volkswagens are quite different to classic Datsuns... so how did all this come about?

"I've always wanted one of these since I was a kid," Jay says matter-of-factly. "Some people dream of 911s, but to me this has always been a better shape. Sound reasoning, there's no arguing with that. 'I found the car advertised online,' he continues. "It was on sale with a dealer in Epping. He'd had it for over a year – it had belonged to a friend of his who'd moved to Malaysia so asked him to sell it. The pictures in the ad were awful, but we took a drive down to view it... and were amazed with what we found. It was so clean!"

It turned out that Jay had lucked-out here, as the car had lived a pampered and easy life; added to this, it was also a Californian import – the one-owner car was all matching-numbers original and had covered just 50,000 miles in its carefree life in Newport Beach, Southern California. And you know what's great about California? The weather's better, so they don't have to grit the roads in the winter. Usually when you find original, unrestored 1970s Z cars they're a bit crumbly – if they've lived in Japan, they've been rained on a lot; if they've been imported to the UK, they haven't been rustproofed and have simply dissolved in the winter salt. But this car? "There was no rust in it anywhere, absolutely none at all," Jay explains, immediately reducing us all to shivering piles of jealousy. Lucky find, right? A deal



## DATSUN 240Z



## TECH CHECK WHICH ZED IS WHICH?

The naming strategy for the S30 Datsuns is pretty logical. These cars, built from 1969-78, were all marketed in their home land as the Fairlady Z, which saved any domestic confusion. In export markets, such as the USA, UK and Australia, the car was originally badged as a 240Z, the number being a nod to its 2.4-litre engine. When that motor was replaced by a 2.6 in 1974, the car naturally became the 260Z – and again, when the 2.8-litre straight-six arrived in 1975, the badges read 280Z.

So given that Jay's Datsun has a 2.8-litre motor in it, can we assume that it's a 280Z? Er, no, actually – what you're looking at here is a 1974 240Z with a later 2.8-litre engine fitted. Which is the best of both worlds really, isn't it?

was done, and he collected the car a week later. The fulfilment of a lifelong dream.

He had no illusions about why he'd bought this car though, there's no denying that. Jay is a dyed-in-the-wool modifier, and he's certainly not a restorer of concours classics. He may find himself at the zeitgeist of the UK modding scene by virtue of what he does for a living, but that doesn't mean he's building cars to impress anyone other than himself – and when this guy embarks upon a project, the sole focus is to satisfy the excitable inner child that's bouncing up and down inside his head. So when he got the car home, the modifications started pretty much straight away. No room to stand on ceremony.

"The Datsun was 100% stock when I bought it," Jay explains. "The very first thing I did was to buy the BRE front lip,

as the front end looks awful without it, and the next job was to do something about the ride height. I ordered a set of BC Racing coilovers from EMP Performance, but I got impatient and just couldn't wait to get the thing lower, so we got it into the shop and cut the springs – just like we did in the '90s!"

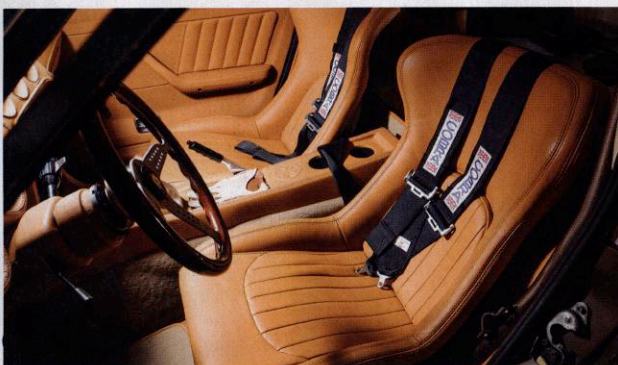
The ghetto lows acted as an entertaining stopgap, and before long the quality BC units took the place of the butchered coils. Jay also fitted an effortlessly cool set of Watanabe wheels that he'd spotted for sale, at the same time getting on the phone to Nankang to order in a set of their sticky AR-1 cut slicks.

"To complement the coilovers, I also went mental on the Techno Toy Tuning website," he laughs. "I basically ordered all of the billet suspension components

they do – arms, struts, bushings, the lot. The guys there looked after me, and Carl brought it all over in his hand luggage." (The fella he's referring to here is Carl Taylor, the other major player in the Players empire; he's based in the States, which is very useful when Jay wants hand-luggage-sized parts brought over!)

It's often the case that classic cars don't quite provide the carefree motoring that one might become accustomed to with modern daily-drivers, and one of the principle concerns with running an old car is the ever-present worry of finding yourself parked on the hard shoulder in a cloud of steam. Thankfully Jay was starting the project with what was already a strong and dependable car, as it had always been lovingly looked after, but for the sake of keeping everything legit he spoke to

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## DATSUN 240Z

Mishimoto about a custom setup to totally overhaul the Datsun's cooling system - something that he says has made a huge difference. It's also a useful base mod in terms of reliability, given that Jay's ultimate treatment of the engine has seen its twin SU carbs replaced with triple Webers, the big-six barking through a custom exhaust to the tune of 200bhp at the wheels. Which is more than enough for hair-raising hijinks in a lightweight, RWD tearabout.

Anyone who's familiar with Jay's projects will know that he likes to swap wheels more often than your Gran changes cardigans, and it was always destined to be the case that those Watanabes would be ousted by something custom. With a certain sense of inevitability, Brian at Rotiform was charged with the task of creating something unique and special for the Z: the result of his endeavours was an old-style design with a fresh new twist, the GTB being a classic four-spoke with significantly more width than you'd have found in the '70s, all topped off with a gorgeous Tequila Sunset finish.

With the exterior smartened up and artfully enhanced, Jay turned his attention to the interior. "I wanted an old-school

Japanese look," he tells us, "and as usual Cobra came up trumps. And I really do use the car a lot now, considering its age; if it's a nice day I'll take it out and rag the life out of it! It's probably the car that gets the most attention out of everything I've ever owned, which is saying a lot when you consider some of the ridiculous stuff we've done in the past."

Again, however, it's the sort of classic that relishes rather than rebuffs modifications, and having taken significant strides down that path, it's unsurprising that Jay has big plans for the next step. "How does a Rebello 3.2 stroker engine running 340bhp sound?" he smirks. It sounds eminently appropriate, doesn't it? After all, the crux of this project has been to take a classic form which many consider to be damn-near perfect, and infuse the influence of today's scene, with its modern materials and design trends, and essentially make the best better. It looks sharp, it sounds superb, and if the next step is to help it keep up with (and perhaps even embarrass) the traffic, then all power to Jay. His Datsun has transcended the ages, and long may it continue to do so. 🌟

### TECHSPEC

**Engine:** 2.8-litre L28 straight-six, triple Weber 40 carbs, custom equal-length manifold, full EMP 2.5-inch stainless steel exhaust system, Mishimoto radiator, 5-speed manual gearbox

**Chassis:** 8x15-inch ET0 and ET-15 Rotiform GTB wheels, 195/50 Nankang AR-1 cut slicks, BC Racing coilovers, Techno Toy Tuning billet lower front and rear control arms, Techno Toy Tuning billet TC rods, Techno Toy Tuning billet hubs

**Interior:** Cobra RS seats, Nardi wood-rim steering wheel

**Exterior:** BRE front splitter, BRE rear ducktail spoiler

**Thanks:** "James at The Play Bay, the boys at John Danby Racing, Brian and Jason at Rotiform, Ben at Nankang, Dom at Snap-On, Tom at Meguiars, the boys at Forge Motorsport, Cobra Seats, Patrick at Mishimoto, the boys at Playhouse, Will and Kev at Chelmsford Autos"

