

My First Car

By: Phil Ray

In October, 1969, the Datsun 240Z was introduced to the American automotive scene with rave reviews. At that time, anything from Japan was described as cheap, plastic, and frankly, junk. Fortunately, the post war Japanese automobile manufacturers had invited Dr. W Edwards Deming to teach them his approach to Total Quality Management. They totally embraced his principles which allowed them to get their foot in the door in America. Motor Trend magazine said of the 240Z, "Next to comfort, the 240Z's forte is straight-line performance, and it has plenty of that. Its power comes from an inline six-cylinder engine that has a displacement of 2393 cubic centimeters and produces 151 horsepower at 5600 rpm. Despite recording excellent acceleration times for a sports car (quarter mile of 16.45 at 83.7 mph), the 240Z still showed good fuel economy by registering an astounding average of 20.2 mpg. The factory lists top speed at 120 mph, but the engine feels extremely strong and it should be possible to reach at least 130 with ease." The goal of the 240Z was to provide exceptional performance at a lower price than its competitors. Then Nissan President Yutaka Katayama (Mr. K) described the 240Z



The Z targeted the automobile capital of the world, America. This photo shows the project members who flew to North America for the 1969 test-drive of the experimental vehicle. Yutaka Katayama is seen center back with arms crossed.

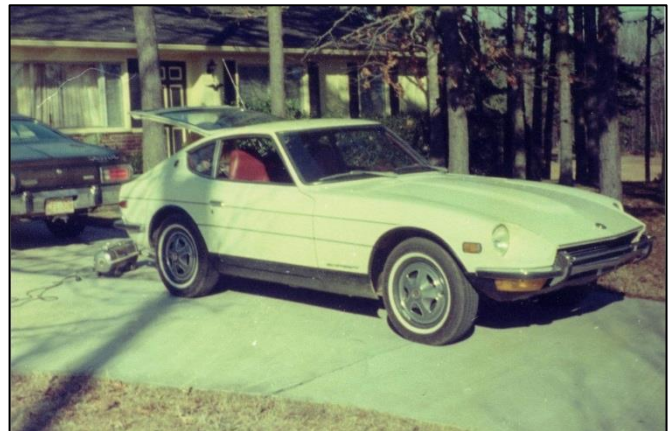
as "an exotic, high-performance car exclusively for America." The result was a minimum six-month waiting list. You got what came off the truck or you didn't get one at all.

My love affair with the 240Z started about five years after its introduction. I repeatedly said, "When I turn 16, I want a Datsun 240Z." Shortly after my 16th birthday, my parents told me they were buying me a car and I had a choice. I could have a used 1972 240Z



Datsun B210 Honey Bee

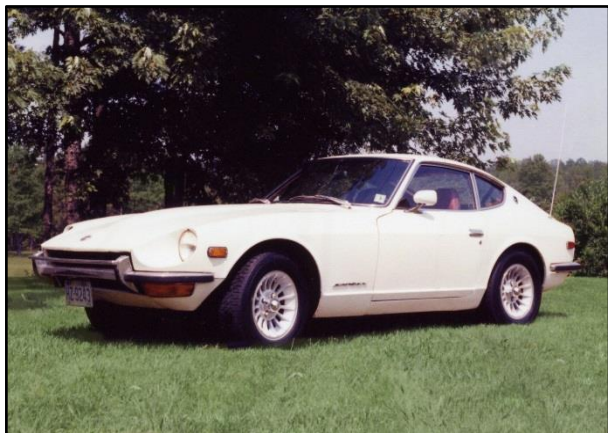
or a Brand New Datsun B210 Honey Bee. Obviously, the choice was easy; I chose the used car over the new car. You can imagine my excitement when my parents pulled in with my 1972 240Z in Kilimanjaro White and a red interior. It didn't take long that day until I started cleaning it from bumper to bumper. At that time,



The day she came home. The cleaning process started, complete with Electrolux vacuum cleaner. Dealer optioned with front and rear over-ride bumpers, white wall tires, and pin stripping.

most of my friends in high school drove American cars. To say the least, my car was pretty unique in this small rural North Carolina town. I still recall my mother's first ride in the car with me. When we got back home, she hopped out and said, "Let me out of this thing. It's like riding on a cat's back." I also have fond memories of my father driving it. I think he got a speeding ticket every time he drove it. Unfortunately, less than a year after I got it, a classmate driving home from high school behind me wasn't paying attention, looked up

and saw me turning, and t-boned my dream car in the driver's door. He literally wrecked my car in my own driveway. But in the time when Bondo was king, everything was repaired and a fresh coat of paint and new American Racing wheels made her look brand new.



Looking brand new after the accident.

For many years, that 240Z was the love of my life. She was there through high school, college, and half of a 20-year Air Force career. During that time, she was towed across the country twice for different Air Force



The coolest car in town.

assignments, from Alabama to California and back to Florida. My 240Z, by now affectionately known as Lucy, had been a part of my life for 15 years. After our first son was born, he often rode in the hatch area in a car-seat strapped to the floor over the spare tire well. And later, when the second son was born, the older son rode in my wife's lap or in the passenger floorboard while the younger one rode in the car-seat in the back, something that would be totally unacceptable these days.

While Datsuns were prone to rust to start with, the combination of salty roads in the mountains of North Carolina during college winters along with the salt air during an assignment in coastal Florida finally took its toll on the body's metal. With rusty fenders and frame-rails, I finally sold my beloved 240Z in Florida in 1991. I can still remember seeing her drive away with the new owner, a tear in my eye. Like most people, I can honestly say that I loved that car, my very first car.

Over the following years Lucy was replaced by a 1987 Nissan 300ZX, a 1991 Nissan 300ZX, and a 2009 Nissan 370Z. I have owned a Z-car my entire adult life, but they never had the same feeling of that first Z. In 2015, my passion for the 240Z hit me pretty hard again. After reading an article on the 240Z in the February 2015 issue of Sports Car Market magazine, I knew I had to have another one. The last sentence of



One of three high school proms.
Hey, it was the 70s. That was the style.

the article said "If you ever want to own a 240Z, the time is now." I knew then and there that I had to have one, and soon! But that's a story for another day.

I often travel to Florida for work and drive around the neighborhood where I sold my first car. On a recent trip, I swore I could feel Lucy's presence. I just knew she was still there after 27 years but I just couldn't find her. I could almost hear her saying to me "I'm still here." And I'll keep looking for her, my Lucy.