

2009 Nissan 370Z

North American Rally

By Joshua Douglas

When I heard the news that Nissan had chosen Z1 Motorsports as the Atlanta location for the Follow the Nissan Z Tour, I was not as surprised as I was excited. Z1 Motorsports has been the authority on the '90+ Z's for years so it only makes sense to unveil the new 370Z here as Z1 will continue to be the leader in the Z community for parts and performance for years to come.

The 370Z's arrived Sunday morning at around 10:30 am and I could not have been more impressed. I had seen countless pictures and videos in preparation for the event but none of them came close to giving me the feeling I got once I saw the two 2009 Nissan 370Z's pull into the parking lot soon to be filled with Z's, G's, GTR's, and more. I immediately started looking at them with anticipation, knowing I would be driving one to Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

I got in one a few minutes after they arrived and moved it to where it would not get in the way of the Follow the Nissan Z crew as they were setting up their tents and such. Once I sat down I felt completely comfortable as the seats wrapped around me. The cockpit is arranged with every gauge in clear view of the driver including the large Tachometer in the center with the rev warning light and the gear position indicator. There is a nice addition of an oil temp gauge in the center however the water temp gauge being just a series of horizontal lights was not quite what I was expecting. The water temp and fuel level gauge are on the same pod with a multi display in the center which I am sure does a few more things than display gas mileage but I only had a few hours with the car so I was not able to play with all of the settings. There is a nice discreet key fob holder to the left and the start/stop button to the right. Under the oil temp gauge, volt meter, and clock sits a tightly wrapped stitched leather console featuring a decent base model stock sound system with auxiliary input. Climate controls follow and are easy to use with auto and manual settings utilizing three well labeled knobs. Then there are the hazard light and S Mode buttons, standard Z shifter, emergency brake handle and a very useful cup holder (fits a 20oz Dr. Pepper snugly). Behind the seats are two shelves which were good for my wallet and a couple of small items but I see myself putting my laptop bag back there if someone else comes along for a short trip.

The Follow the Nissan Z event started at noon with a few Z owners rolling in early to get a good spot to show off their vehicles. The event crew decided to park one 370Z in the showroom next to Z1's 1200+ RWHP '93 Nissan 300zx convertible and the other outside under the Nissan tent next to the Follow the Nissan Z Promo tent serving food with Z1's own Bryan doing an excellent job as the DJ. By 2:00 pm the parking lot was filled with Z's from all years, G35's, G37's, and GTR's from several years including eight R35's. The Dyno was spinning with a line of cars waiting to see what their car put to the wheels. The highest hp pump gas run was an unprecedented (at least here at Z1) 722 RWHP by John Paul Beckman's highly modified '90 300zx Twin Turbo, highest hp race gas run was Corey Taylor's '04 350z (Z1 Longblock, APS Extreme Twin Turbo kit) laying down an easy 744RWHP. I was told that about 250 Z's and G's showed up for the

event. All of this just for the unveiling of a new Z car, not to mention the high for the day was 48 degrees. The dedication of these enthusiasts to be out here in the cold to just look at the new Z added to my anticipation of Monday's trip.

Monday morning at about 9:30 am I got in the car to make the trip out to Winston-Salem, stopped to get gas and a fresh Dr. Pepper, and was on the road. Not only was I driving the Monterey Blue base model with Sport package Z accompanied by Mike (creator of our Z Nationals DVD's) who was filming the trip, Russell (owner of Z1) was driving the Chicane Yellow Z which had all available options, and we were followed by the Follow the Nissan Z crew. We jumped onto I-20 about 10:00am and the Z did exactly what I had hoped for, nice smooth transitions between gears with quick acceleration and ease around the slower traffic to cruising speeds. While cruising towards Atlanta, Russell and I played around for the camera down shifting and darting past each other, creeping forward and easing back, ultimately getting a feel for this awesome new vehicle. The Z likes to rev and will let you get in trouble if you don't pay close attention to the needle on the speedometer. While cruising in 6th gear I danced around accelerating and decelerating and began to really enjoy how the Z's VVEL (Variable Valve Event and Lift) continuously changed intake timing and valve lift flattening out the torque curve making the Z very responsive and impressively powerful at all RPM's.

Once we made it through Atlanta we stopped at a gas station to "stretch our legs" and let Mike switch cars so he could film the blue Z. With the VDC off we headed back towards I-85. I hit the on ramp and touched second gear to feel the rear tires give way and the car change directions only to have it push itself back straight staying on the throttle and pointing it in the right direction. Again the Z feels very strong at any RPM.

Back on the road it is time to test out the Synchro Rev Match which basically matches RPM's based on actual speed and gear selection. So with the S Mode turned on I pushed the clutch in and began to change gears. The engine stayed revved to a certain RPM and whenever I put the shifter into a specific gear the Synchro rev match system immediately matched the engine speed to the perfect RPM where it should be at the current speed of the car. I am looking forward to trying this out on the track but will obviously have to wait until I get mine.

We kept on track and drove on until we got to Concord, SC where we met up with Andy (and his GTR). Mike switched to yet another vehicle to get some good film of both of the 370Z's. Then made it to Charlotte, NC where we met up with another GTR owner Matt (set up the stop in Winston-Salem) and a couple more Z and G owners. We ate a quick lunch and got right back on the road with Matt and Robin (proud 350Z owner) close behind. We made it to Modern Nissan right at 4:00 pm where the Z's were on display for a couple hours and then were loaded onto a transport truck to make the final leap to the next stop in Chantilly, Virginia.

Shortcomings of this Z are minimal. Driving through several cities and rural areas during the roughly 400 mile trip I noticed the 19" Bridgestone's made a considerable amount of noise, on certain pavements the volume of this noise was almost unbearable. The quarter windows seem non-existent while driving so I will have to learn to trust my mirrors more. I also could have used some more lumbar support from the seats for the long road trip, but for the short trip and around town the seats will do.

This Z encompasses almost everything an enthusiast would want. The 332hp 3.7L VVEL V6 is very responsive at all speeds making driving anywhere a blast whether it be

to the convenience store around the corner or to the next Z Nationals. The cockpit is small but not cramped feeling with large easy to read gauges well placed. The hatch held mine and Mike's overnight bags, a tripod, and our coats with room to spare. I wish I had had more time with the car to get more acquainted to how it reacts on the curvy back roads around here but, I have a good feeling about it. Overall once the trip was over I was sad to see it end since I knew I would not be in one of these cars again for at least a month. In my 370Z, I will be looking forward to changing the tires and seats, and of course a lot of track time.

Car and Driver's John Phillips said it best: "At this price, possibly the best sports car on the planet."