

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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**SPORTS
LUXE / DIRT
ROAD TRIPS
COMPAROS**
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Nissan 370Z 6M/T

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



Purity of mission and execution

332 HORSES' WORTH OF ZIP FOR UNDER \$30,000 by Joe Sage

The sports car craze in the US following World War II comprised almost exclusively two-seat European roadsters—MG, Triumph, Austin-Healey, Jaguar, even the occasional Porsche 356 Roadster or Speedster. In Japan, there were the Datsun 1600 and then 2000 roadsters, but as righthand-drivers, those never hit our market.

Porsche broke the mold in the early '60s with the new 911—rear-engined, air-cooled and performance-engineered within a sleek coupe-like envelope, envied by many but available to few. Before that decade was out—barely—the new Datsun 240Z hit our shores. Front-engined, water-cooled and also performance-engineered within a sleek coupe-like envelope, the Z-car was an instant hit—affordable, offering more predictable handling than the early 911 and even doing very well with a newly important factor on the scale: fuel economy.

The idea of the Z-car—all the above attributes, wrapped in a famously reliable package of Japanese engineering—changed the world. A durable

change it has been, too. Flash forward all these decades, and while many performance cars have taken on low-slung, closed-cabin, midengine supercar form—and run well into six figures—the Nissan Z-car has survived as conceived, fundamentals intact, while continually and meaningfully refined.

The 911 has kept its rear-engine coupe layout, though while becoming water-cooled, developing technology to mitigate rear-engine weight imbalance and adding thick layers of luxury, its price has climbed ever more, now running from \$91,100 to \$293,200 base before (always pricey) add-ons.

Functionality and feel, instrumentation and trim, and controls and interfaces of the 370Z are today in many ways reminiscent of Nissan's top performance car, the GT-R—and that is a heck of a family credential to evoke. Yet the 332-hp 2018 Nissan 370Z, though sharing DNA and reflecting the aura of its supercar sibling, starts at just \$29,990. For perspective, the base 370-hp 911 runs \$91,100, while \$99,900 gets you a 565-hp Nissan GT-R. You

don't even need to be good at math to do the math.

The stylish and hot little number we're driving here is indeed the base model. (The full trim range runs from \$29,990 to \$38,090, or \$45,690 for the world-of-its-own NISMO Z.) Our only add-ons were the Heritage Edition Yellow kit (mirrors, decal badging and nifty interior upgrades, also available currently in magnetic black, pearl white or deep blue pearl) for just \$790—and carpeted floor mats. That's it. That's \$31,795 with destination charge, manual-shift driver engagement and the same 332-horse fun of any trim level (except NISMO's 350 hp, 5.4 percent more power for 53 percent more cash than our base model, though it adds more than horses).

Inside and out, under the hood and beneath the skin, the Z-Car engineering and styling teams demonstrate brand understanding, consistency and expression beyond all but just a few other brands. We could fill a book with details large and small that show their devotion to concept and mission.

We've noted that this could be an absolutely golden age for the automobile, if only most vehicles could peel away many layers of fluff and intervention and just concentrate on modern effi-

cient horsepower, well-developed suspension, solid rack and pinion steering, and highly capable disc brakes. Well, here's such a car.

We were highly engaged behind the wheel of the 370Z, all the moreso with the 6-speed manual in our example (although a 7-speed automatic is available for \$1400, for those who like to exercise just two or three limbs while driving).

The cabin is very quiet, though with tangible road connection—very connected and sporty for an everyday driver, which is exactly the balance it should have. You simply hear the precision whine of one very finely tuned and powerful machine, with a smooth, tight transmission and drivetrain. As the light turns green and we effortlessly dust a BMW in the next lane, all we can think is that our winning car cost half as much. Perfection.

We embraced the simplicity of this base model. Seats are black cloth with yellow trim, comfortable and handsome, never making us covet leather (which is only in higher trims). Options beyond ours are fairly minimalist—spoilers, a few NISMO items, but an advanced nav and audio screen is also only in higher trims. Instead, in addition to a traditional glovebox and a well-positioned console bin, there's a third storage bin, top center where nav might live, one more great way to pack for a

sports car road trip, with a nice double-stitched seam down the middle of its leather-like surface. Below that are a small, simple LCD screen displaying three lines of info, with simple audio control from two knobs and a set of buttons (the knobs include a dimension of electronic control, and the system can take feed from your music device). It has a simplicity and mechanical feel, despite being basically all digital, again reminiscent of the GT-R. We're glad it emulates its big brother, always a great place for life lessons.

(This car was built before the May backup camera mandate, so we'll see how they accommodate that. Visibility in a small coupe is limited by its very nature, so a solution should not be unwelcome.)

Binnacle readouts in black and orange use both LED and liquid crystal, all done with modern electronics, but reminiscent of the graphics from a video game or calculator in the '70s, also perfect for the pure feel of this car. The drivetrain, instruments, controls, even mechanical buttons are all a delicious taste of what things were like before cars started emulating self-dialing smartphones.

If you like highly tactile input into and feedback from your machine, you'll love this base model 370Z and its price point. The Z-car stays true to its roots, including the biggest one: fun! ■

SPECIFICATIONS

BUILD	2-seat; unibody; corrosion-resistant high-strength steel; aluminum hood, doors, hatch
ENGINE	3.7L 24v longitudinal alum/alum V6
HP/TORQUE	332 hp / 270 lb-ft
EXHAUST	single muffler, Y-type dual outlets
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual standard 7-speed auto available
DRIVESHAFT	carbon fiber composite
DRIVETRAIN	RWD
STEERING	power rack & pinion
SUSPENSION	F: double-wishbone aluminum; high vacuum diecast alum alloy subframe; twin-tube shocks; stblzr bar
R: indep multi-link aluminum; steel subframe;	twin-tube shocks; stblzr bar
BRAKES	F: 12.6x1.0 vent / R: 12.6x0.63 solid
WHEELS	alum alloy: F: 18x8 / R: 18x9
TIRES	Yokohama ADVAN Sport F: P225/50R18 / R: P245/45R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	167.4 in / 100.4 in
COEFFICIENT OF DRAG / LIFT	Cd 0.30 / Cl 0.0
TURNING CIRCLE	32.8 ft
HEADROOM / LEGROOM	38.2 / 42.9 in
CARGO VOLUME	6.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB (F/R)	3333 lb / 55/45
FUEL / CAPACITY	prem unl / 19.0 gal
MPG	18/26/21 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$29,990
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	130
334 HERITAGE EDITION YELLOW: black outside mirrors; gloss black decals for hood, roof, rear hatch and sides; yellow interior accents for steering wheel, stitching, console and shifter.....	790
DESTINATION CHARGE	885
TOTAL	\$31,795

