

Member RideZ

Rick Lapp

This issue "Member RideZ" is on Rick Lapp from St. Petersburg, member #98. Sent in from Rick directly in his own words! *Enjoy and thankz Rick - M (article revised & updated by Rick 8/07)*

I visited my in-laws in Florida in the early '70s and was surprised at the influx of "cheap" Japanese cars there (I lived in Ohio). Everywhere I went in Florida I saw hundreds of these little Toyota 1600 "Deluxe" four-bangers and similar Datsuns. The oil embargo and rising gas prices had hit home big time, and the little old FL retirees couldn't get enough of these cars. The little imports were "saving us" from the OPEC countries' greed.

Then one day my father-in-law called me and said something like "There's this new car I've seen around down here and it's really neat looking!". Of course, he was referring to the first Datsun 240Z he had seen. I didn't even know they existed at that time. Upon my next visit to Florida, I saw one! Wow! It was yellow w/ reddish and brown panel-painted strips behind the front wheels - and I was in love!

Having been thoroughly disgusted with all the problems I had with my '56 MGA (lever shocks, Lucas "electrics" [mostly just metallic items of varying resistance], drive train idiosyncrasies, etc.), I was not in the mood for another "sports car". Then I saw that Z. I read about how different the Z was from other sports cars, and when I saw my first Ohio Z in a Datsun dealer's used car lot in January of 1976, I just had to have it! It was a late (9/74) 260 - Sterling Silver metallic (#306) w/ 27K miles - "already".



I went to the credit union (they knew me) and asked for a \$5500 loan to buy the Z. After we got through the "What? You want to pay \$5500 for a used DATSUN!?!", and after the CU manager made a few calls, I got the loan. The CU manager had no idea that new Zs were selling for \$7500+.

The photo #1 shows the Z brand new (to me) in 1976. For date confirmation, see my bell-bottoms and hair (I have a bald spot now).

BUT GOD, I HATED THOSE BIG, FAT, UGLY BUMPERS!



I drove it to work (teaching) for a few days, and then I started "getting it" from my 7th-grade students. "What are you, a communist?" (I know that makes no sense). "Why are you buying Jap junk?". "Don't you know that you're putting my dad out of work?"

It was true. I had forgotten to take into account that most of our school's tax base came from the Fischer Body (GM) plant just one mile from the school, so I lived with that hassle for several years. The GM plant is long gone. I still drive my 260 almost every day.

I bought louvers for the small side windows and the hatch, as well as one of the best investments I've ever made: a set of American Racing wire baskets that, IMHO, were the

best-looking wire baskets (i.e. fake wires) ever made. That was 1982, and I have the same wire baskets on the Z today. I recently had to buy new rims due to a "curb accident" and thinning chrome.



PHOTO #3

1982 price for the wheels: \$241.00

PHOTO #3 - I STILL HATED THOSE FAT BUMPERS!

I had the engine "rebuilt" (honed/de-carboned) in 1991 - and replaced the bumpers with Import Performance steel ones from Bob Sharp Racing.

PHOTO #4, I was having vapor lock problems occasionally in Ohio, and knew when I moved to Florida that the problems would be worse. I bought and installed the Weber DGVs at that time. The car was still my DD, so I just did normal maintenance until we retired (1998 - age 53) and moved to St. Pete.

Photo #5, is the first shot of the Z in Florida. I was so happy to find that the Webers worked great. The hotter it got, the better it ran. No more vapor lock!

When we got to Florida however, we had a lot to do on the house, so the Z got parked in the garage except for an occasional drive until I found the IZCC in 2000.

It's stock - except for the Webers (and wheels, bumpers). I have plans, but I'm beginning to be less hurried than I once was. I replaced the brake hoses, rear cylinders, and linings this past summer ('01) and replaced lots of other small things). Then in '02 came the front discs, calipers, new Mountain rotors, and Metal Master pads. I have used silicone brake fluid since 1980. I also have a 5-speed and a BRAND new R-200 sitting in my garage. When will there be time? I also have plans for new 240-style bumpers. When? I also really need to replace front-end (all?) bushings first. T/C bushings and ball joints are done. I just had a new 2 1/2" tailpipe and muffler put on. Carl Beck (IZCC) and Suncoast ZCC member Jim Frederick both helped me with the brake work, and have continued to provide me with sage advice.

This Z (my only one) was owned for the first year by a fellow who was a cellist for the Cincinnati Symphony, and he wouldn't take



PHOTO #4

delivery on the car until he could drive it straight to his appointment at Ziebart rust-proofing. I credit this move for the (almost) absolute absence of rust, which is great since it spent the first 24 years in Ohio. I have had to have two small rust spots repaired in the lower, left (one in lower front fender, one in lower rear fender). I took it back to Ziebart in about 1990 to have the rust-proofing touched up, and they Ziebarted the entire engine bay! Thank you - NOT! I spent the better part of three days last summer ('02) removing much of the upper engine bay rust-proofing with kerosene. The before and after shot of the engine bay show my effort (I hope). I have since then polished and painted the valve cover (it looks great), and bought two new Weber chrome air cleaners.

It was repainted in Ohio in '96 - mostly because the clear coat had cracked. The original enamel was fine. The interior is perfect: all original (drivers seat cover replaced, undetectable), NO cracks. It's not particularly (throw you back in your seat) fast. Engine "rebuild", early 90s @ 80K; top-end rebuild, and new stock cam '98. Oh, I wish I knew then

AT the moment I need new shocks, then I'll get busy on the repl. bumpers. I had the rear finisher panel covered with a fiberglass panel to eliminate the ugly contours of the stock '74 panel. It continues to be a work in progress, but I'm finally getting close to the appearance I want. UPDATE (6/'04): Since I first submitted the original article, I have made quite a bit more progress.

This Z (my only one) was owned for the first year by a fellow who was a cellist for the Cincinnati Symphony, and he wouldn't take

In the summer of 2003, I drove up to Jim Frederick's (newly constructed) Dream Garage, and we began engine work in earnest. Jimbo pulled and disassembled the engine, and took it to his favorite machine shop - Tommy's Amtex Casting Repair, in Ybor City, FL. C. David Wilder (SZCC member) and I climbed into the engine bay, and began the cleaning and painting in preparation for the "new" engine. The Ziebart was very thick, particularly on the frame rails, but what we saw when we removed it was astounding: they were absolutely rust free, and the original paint was nearly perfect throughout the entire engine bay! I guess I'm not so upset with Ziebart any more. The engine was bored .020" over; new flat top pistons, and rings (etc.) were installed, and an E31 head. Jim also put in new gaskets, timing kit, rod and main bearings, a rebuilt 280zx dizzy, emission-free exhaust manifold, rebuilt '71 SUs, 240 fuel rail and balance tube, and stock air cleaner. He also had a used, but very nice 5-speed tranny, and we put in my brand new 3.90 R200 diff. Also added were new U-joints, new 280 clutch, pressure plate, throw out bearing, pilot bearing, rear A-arm bushings and trans/diff mounts (good-bye clunk!). New KYB shocks all around. The block was repainted Nissan blue, and the head is painted with a durable, aluminum paint. I have added a new chrome valve cover, NGK plug wires, and had the fuel rail and balance tube ceramic-coated in a polished-aluminum finish.



PHOTO #6- Jim can tune SUs (!), and the car runs SO MUCH better than when I bought it (remember the flat-top SUs?). I have compression of 200 to 205 in every cylinder, and a 10:1 comp ratio (Hello, premium fuel). Carl Beck helped me calculate the present displacement at 2834 cc's. I can spin the rear tires to my heart's content (if I were so inclined), but I normally get 20 mpg around town now. After all, I'll be 60 this November.

I can't thank Jim Frederick enough for his top-notch work, as well as the superior machine work at Tommy's, and all the help I got from C. David Wilder and Carl Beck. Z friends are the BEST!

Now, on to those 240-style bumpers!

Rick



Update as of 7/12/2007

I FINALLY can report that I have installed the 240 bumpers. This turned out to be a bit of a task as both front and rear valence panels had to be replaced. The rear panel was convoluted (unlike the 240 rear panel), and had to be redone with a fiberglass piece to look smooth. The 260 front valence panel was much taller than the 240's, so I bought a 240 composite valence panel from Smoothline, and installed that. Some of the parts behind the 260 panel were obtrusive, and had to be removed and/or moved back and up to fit the 240 panel correctly. The difference between the 260 and 240 panels is shown here:



The front bumper shocks were removed, and 240 bumper mounts were installed. The 260 turn signals (on the grill) were removed, and the grille was replaced with a 240 unit. New 240 turn signal units were placed in the new valence panel. 240 bumper mounts were added and fabricated slightly to accommodate the 240 bumper.

The rear 240 bumper was attached directly to the rear shock bumper pistons, with the "support" of a ¼" steel "underbar" inside it for strength. Holes were carefully drilled to accept the bumper end supports in the rear quarter panels.

Now my 260 has the 240 "look" that I've always wanted.



The 260 is now "complete" with the exception of some minor paint touch up around the windshield frame.

I am ONE HAPPY CAMPER! The 260 recently took a "Best of Show" at a local event.

Thank you for reading and sharing my story.

Rick Lapp
SZCC #89
IZCC #10474

8/12/2007