



Nissan finishing school graduate

This larrikin goes to top of the class

Nissan's 370Z is lighter and brighter than its predecessor, which is something of a trend reversal, says **Dave Moore**.

Nissan's 350Z would have been labelled something of a charming larrikin had it been human. By contrast, its 370Z replacement appears to have had a stint in finishing school.

That's because it's prettier and slightly less brutal to look at, a whole lot easier to drive but more powerful to boot.

That's not to say that the 350Z was bad car; it wasn't.

In fact upon its appearance in 2003, it was so nimble and Porsche-quick, that it allowed us to forgive Datsun/Nissan for allowing its original 240Z Z-car to metamorphose, Elvis – like through several iterations until it became an over-weight parody of its original self.

The metamorphosis from 350Z to 370Z is pretty extreme and in the opposite direction, and though there are visual similarities, it's almost as if a generation of the car has been skipped in the making of this new model.

The 370Z is altogether more visually sinuous and organic than the 350Z. And far from being a re-skin, the new car's body envelops a wheelbase that's shorter by 100mm, while its overall length is now just 4250mm – down by 65mm.

Though its also wider and lower than before, the 370Z is 50kg lighter, due to the use of aluminium for its doors, bonnet and hatch.

The change in the interior isn't a gradual one either. It's a sea-change. The almost laughably wobbly, ill-textured plastics are gone, along with the square 60s Cadillac-like steering-wheel switches.

They're replaced with almost luxurious soft-touch vinyl matrixes, and knobs and toggles that really do look like they were designed for a modern, style-leading car.

When the press-button starter is prodded, the voice has changed too, thanks to Nissan's latest 3.7-litre V6, which adds 20kW to the Z-car's repertoire, at 245kW.

As well as its extra 200ccs, the 3.7-litre engine gets what Nissan calls: Variable Valve Event and Lift, or VVEL which is able to optimise intake valve movements, allowing the engine to 'breathe' more precisely into the combustion chamber.

The VVEL is also better for emissions, allowing a quicker catalyst warm-up and making for more efficient combustion when the engine is cool. The 370Z has an ingenious industry first, in the form of a Synchro Rev Match system that works as if the six-speed gearbox and throttle is automatically making heel and toe shifts for you.

The alternative transmission is a seven-speed paddle-shift automatic, and it would probably be this transmission that I'd employ in 'my' 370Z, able to be left to its own devices most of the time, but soon triggered from its slumber by the paddles which appear to pop-through their ratio shifts at least as quickly as the clever, flattering six-speed manual.

A strong criticism of the old 350Z was its coarse, rather compromised ride quality. Somehow, the new 370Z – despite running on low-profile 19-inch alloy rims – rides in a far more composed fashion than the old car. A lot of this is to do with the car's heavily-revised structure.

Front body torsional rigidity is improved by 30 per cent and rear body rigidity by 22 per cent, which allows the suspension to do what it is designed for; to provide shock absorption and body control and not to compensate for any lack of body stiffness.

Over bumps that would induce wincing when in the old car, the 370Z is almost impervious, absorbing shock beautifully and allowing the V6 engine's extra grunt to be applied with much more confidence, whatever the going.

It's all helped by well-weighted and communicative steering which imparts a commendably accurate 'picture' of the road surface and its likely grip levels.

Nissan says it will hit 100km/h in the five-second bracket.

The 370Z does lose a little against its 350Z in some areas. The shorter body and wheelbase means that there's a smaller fuel tank for starters, but Nissan says the engine's improved frugality takes care of that.

The luggage space is a little tighter under the rear glass, too. However the 370Z has extremely useful load areas placed in the bulkhead right behind the seats which will take a typical airline carry-on bag without too much trouble.

Unfortunately neither front seat has a simple tilt mechanism to allow access to this area, and the power seat back takes an age and so small is the radius over which it does move that you can really only place your bags in this useful space from inside the car.

Fix this please, Nissan.

The Nissan 370Z report card is pretty good as it happens. The few drawbacks are niggles and certainly not sale-breakers, while the rest of the car amounts to a number of resounding improvements over the old 350Z.

Quicker, more refined, better to drive, sharper to look at and lighter, the 370Z is also about \$4500 cheaper. Ladies and Gentlemen, the 350Z has left the building.



LOOKING GOOD: The 370Z is altogether more visually sinuous and organic than the 350Z

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➤ NISSAN'S 370Z

PRICING: Manual \$71,200, automatic \$73,200.

HOT: Looks: performance; improved cabin; chassis and ride improved; cheaper than 350Z.

NOT: Can't tilt seats properly; visibility; smaller hatch space.

VERDICT: Bargain Z4, TT and Cayman chaser with loads of character.

➤ NISSAN 370Z DRIVETRAIN:

Front-mounted, RWD, quad-cam fuel-injected 3.7-litre 24v v6, producing 245kw at 7000rpm and 363nm at 5200rpm. Seven-speed automatic or six-speed manual. Max 248km/h, 0-100km 5.0secs, 9.7l/100km, 220gm/km c02. Chassis: Double wishbone front, multi-link rear suspension. Vented front and rear disc brakes. 19 inch alloy wheels front and rear

