



Nissan eyeing race return

Nissan's GT-R, thrown out of touring car racing in the 90s, could soon be back at Bathurst, reports Fairfax's Jez Spinks.

The Japanese sports car banned from Australian motorsport for being too quick is planning a return to Bathurst in 2009.

In Japan Nissan has just launched the fourth-generation version of the Skyline GT-R that was dubbed Godzilla locally in the early '90s after it thrashed V8-powered Holdens and Fords in Australia's touring car championship.

A limited production run of only 12,000 cars a year means Nissan Australia must wait until early 2009 to import the new 353kW GT-R, but the company is already considering its motor racing options for the most powerful production car to yet come out of Japan.

Nissan will get back into some form of motorsport [in Australia] to show the capabilities of this vehicle [the GT-R], says Ross Booth, marketing manager for Nissan Australia.

"One of the problems with Australian motorsport is a lack of a showcase for this type of vehicle [GT-R]. The organisers

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of V8 Supercars wouldn't let us race in 1993 and I can guarantee they're not going to let us race in 2008. It's not a taxi, as you know.

"It's a matter of what's the right [motorsport] programme for it, and when we do it bearing in mind the car doesn't go on sale here until early 2009," says Booth.

"One of the most obvious options is the Targa [Tasmania] rally. And whether we can enter it into the Bathurst 12-hour depends on the rules. At the moment there's a \$125,000 [price tag] cut-off limit."

The new Nissan GT-R is expected to cost about \$150,000 when it finally arrives in Australia.

Booth says Nissan has mixed feelings about the Australian touring car organisers decision to ban the original Skyline GT-R after it won successive touring car titles from 1990 to 1992.

At the time Nissan was quite upset at the decision and

quite rightly so, says Booth, who worked for Ford at the time. The GT-R was a very formidable opponent, and to take it out of the No 1 Australian motorsport category was very controversial.

"[But] it probably helped create a bit of legend around the GT-R. Basically it added some mystique. It was a great way to get the vehicle known, because it was absolutely killing the opposition for a number of years. The GT-R was for the time an exceptionally engineered car."

It was only beaten by the [touring car] organiser basically reacting to the mob, says Booth, referring to the infamous 1992 Bathurst 1000 podium outburst by victorious GT-R driver Jim Richards.

Richards responded to booing V8 fans by calling them a pack of arseholes.

Nissan Japan has announced a race car version of the new GT-R will compete in the GT500 class of Japan's 2008 Super GT Series.



BACK AT BATHURST: Nissan's latest GT-R could be back racing in Australia.
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