

YEAR OF THE Z

The Real JDM is a monthly column written by Ben Schaffer of Bespoke Ventures. Bespoke Ventures operates a number of JDM related businesses including: Bulletproof Automotive, Top Secret III, Ings+1 USA, VARIS USA, HyperRev USA and Bespoke VIP. Visit www.bespokeventures.com for more information.



The Z33 chassis Fairlady Z, known to the US market as the 350Z is no stranger to tuning. The Z has a long legacy of tuning and everyone knew from the start that the 350Z would be no exception. The second the Z33 was released, the aftermarket got straight to work. We've seen turbo kits, aero kits, suspension and all of the typical modification you'd expect for a hot new tuner car. Based on my conversations with tuners back when the Z33 was released, they initially weren't convinced on the car's ability but they did feel an obligation to provide support parts, after all the Z33 undeniably represented a large market that couldn't be overlooked. Fast forward to 2006, what I now consider the year of the Z. Attitudes have changed, technology and tuning has advanced, and the Z33 which used to be a safe bet for tuners now represents not only a large market, but also a competitive platform for racing. Reminiscent

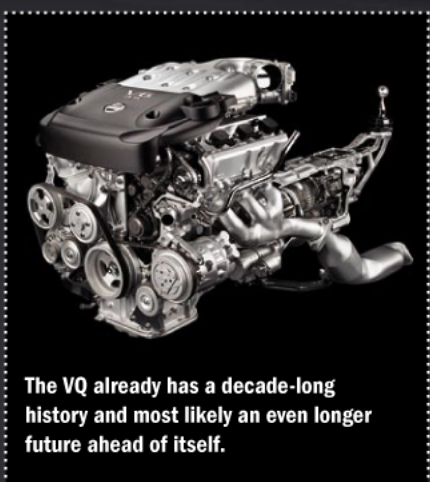
of the GT-R in its prime, all tuners seem to be focused on the Z and its VQ engine (an engine shared in the G35 Coupe, Murano, FX35, M35, Maxima and most likely the upcoming GT-R). After talking with various Japanese tuners in January, every one seemingly shared a common focus on VQ engine tuning for 2006. It's not just talk, the amount of new products released recently is staggering. At the Tokyo Auto Salon my discussion with HKS found that they are focused on covering the entire range of VQ tuning options with products including: single turbo kits, twin turbo kits, supercharger kits, low compression pistons and high compression pistons. Meanwhile Top Secret made an extremely bold statement with their new RB26DETT in favor of a N/A-tuned VQ. Upon further investigation and talking with Smoky Nagata, it seems that he and 20+ other tuning shops are in a race to get 400 wheel horsepower naturally aspirated out of the VQ engine. This proves that of all Z tuning trends,

N/A tuning has the most steam behind it right now. After all, the prospect of 400 wheel horsepower at high RPM out of a 3.5L would make for a great street legal, emissions friendly foundation for any weekend racer whether Z chassis, GT-R chassis or otherwise. The fan base in Japan is doing their role to support the tuners in their quest for faster Zs. In January, News Publishing Japan (of Hyper-Rev fame) released the first ever issue of Z magazine, focusing exclusively on the Z33 chassis. The magazine featured a Z only race, pitting the top tuners against one another. In this first ever battle at NICO, Autech Tsukada pulled off an upset victory, beating the two favored competitors the Amuse 350Z CSL and the new Nismo Z RS-Tune Concept. Nismo Japan's RS Concept Z has been big news in Japan since its debut in January. Even before the concept car was released, many Nismo tuning parts, especially their head packages, have been favorites of tuners building maximum power N/A-tuned Zs.



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The new Nismo flagship Z exudes the same attitude and intent as their now infamous GT-R Z Tune. Complete with all of Nismo's technology, know how and reliability, the RS Concept puts out a rumored 350 horsepower and revs to 8000 rpm. It may someday be sold to the public, but currently it is still in prototype form. Luckily for tuners, nearly all of the products on the car from its engine components to its new aerodynamics are already for sale in Japan. Speaking of hot products to improve the Z, Tokyo Auto Salon 2006 introduced some of the best parts we've seen yet. For aerodynamics, undeniably the three hottest new aerodynamic kits for 2006 are the Top Secret long nose, the Nismo RS Concept and the Ings+1 Type E. The Ings+1 Type E kit in particular is running in Super Taikyu and also on the Autech Tsukada time attack winning Z. Engine wise 2006 has already brought us a twin turbo kit, 6 throttle ITB kit, carbon ITB induction box and an intake pipe kit from Top Secret alone. Meanwhile tuning shops like MCR, Amuse, Yashio Factory and others are further refining their own special in house produced full tuned VQ engines. With all of this excitement towards the VQ recently, let's recap some of the VQ's history and touch on its relevance to modern-day VQ tuning. The VQ block has been in production since 1994 in Japan, making its introduction on the A32 Cefiro as a VQ20DE. Since that time it has been used in the Stagea, Fuga, El Grande, Presage, Gloria, Frontier and Cima amongst others. What is interesting in this is the versatility of how it's been used. The VQ has seen configurations as the VQ25DET, a turbocharged engine in the Stagea, and it's also seen torque heavy use as the VQ40DE in the Frontier. With such a wide range of OEM products and configurations, perhaps we're just seeing the beginning of VQ tuning as future tuners raid Japanese junkyards to pick parts that produce factory turbo and stroked variations of the VQ engine. The VQ already has a decade-long history and most likely an even longer future ahead



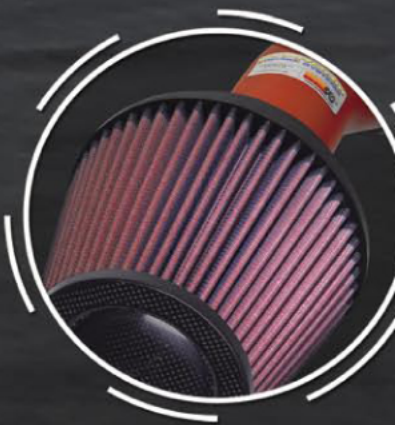
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of itself. With future variations being used in potentially iconic cars like the GT-R, VQ tuning is a sure bet to be the staple of all JDM Nissan tuning and may remain that way for the next decade to come. As used Zs and G35s depreciate further, the cost of entry into the market will become more affordable and cars like Zs will be as common as Silvias are at drift events and track days. Although in the past Zs have not dominated drifting or time attack, consider 2006 the year when they make their mark felt. Imamura has already been seen doing amazing things piloting the Top Secret/ORC Z D1 car, meanwhile Autech Tsukada, Amuse and others are getting serious about building lightweight high power time attack cars. Will this be the year we see a D1 champion Z and Zs running under a minute at Tsukuba? We'll see... My bets are on 2006 marking the emergence of the Z33 as a viable competitor within the drift and time attack arena and furthermore I feel that 2006 will be a milestone year towards the platform's future dominance within the tuner market. Honda, Mitsubishi, Toyota and others should take notice; the renaissance of Nissan tuning is taking over the industry once again. ■

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