

# SPORTS CAR

INTERNATIONAL

## Dealer's Choice:

*365-Horse Stillen SMZ Leads the Way  
in Factory/Tuner Teamwork*



## Light Fantastic:

*Porsche GT2, Honda NSX-R,  
New Viper, '54 Ferrari 500*

SEPTEMBER 1995



USA \$2.95 CAN. \$3.50 UK £1.95

**Page 28:**

*"Attacking the road with dignified aggression."*



**Page 56:**

*"Apply too much power and traction is history."*



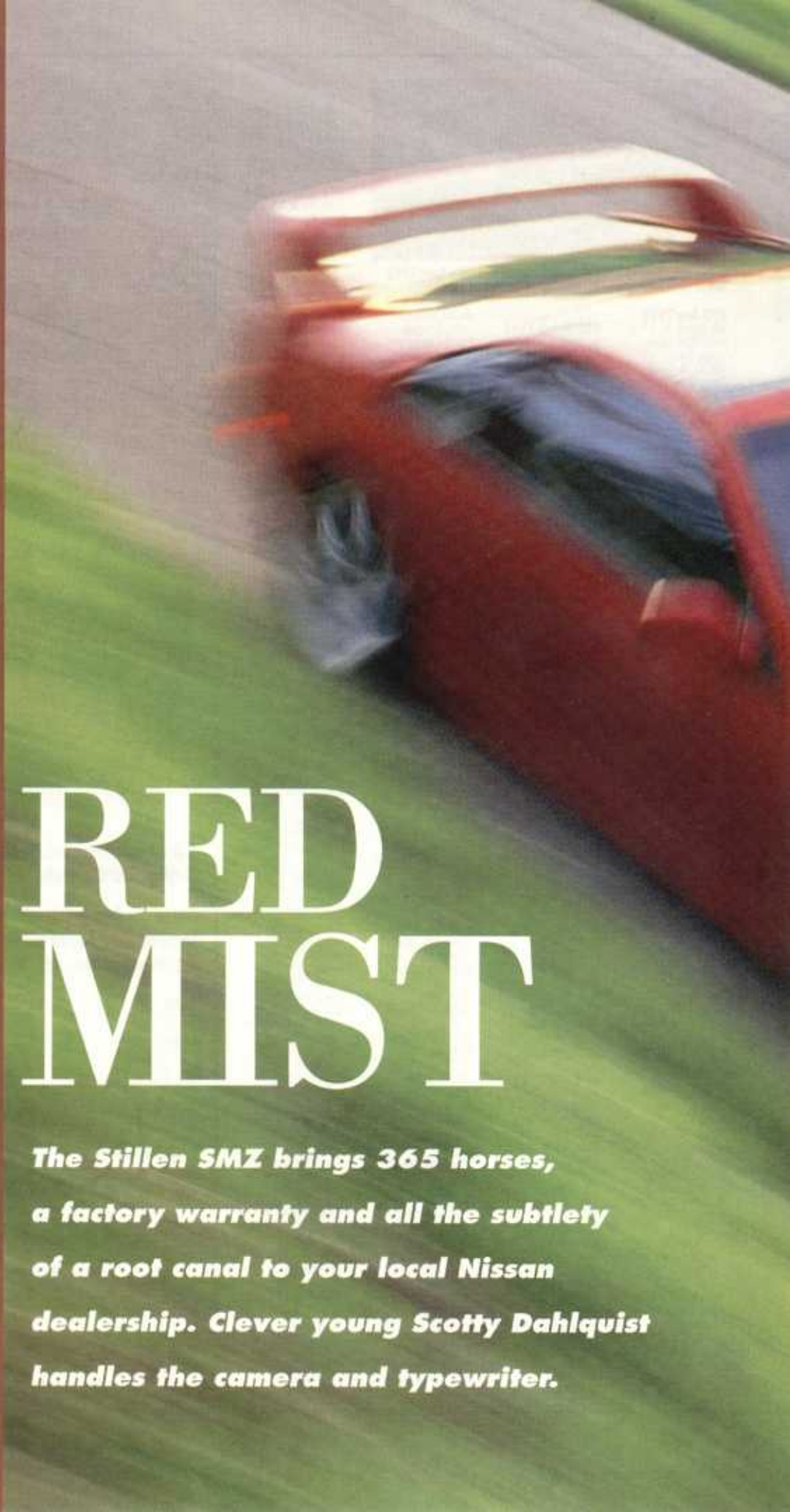
**Page 40:**

*"Ultimately debilitating."*



# RED MIST

*The Stillen SMZ brings 365 horses, a factory warranty and all the subtlety of a root canal to your local Nissan dealership. Clever young Scotty Dahlquist handles the camera and typewriter.*





**LA traffic bites. Two hours ago I dropped a** stock 300ZX Twin Turbo off back at Nissan HQ, drove up to Steve Millen's shop in Costa Mesa and picked up the Stillen SMZ, Steve's latest killer Z-car and the first of his turnkeys to be offered directly through Nissan dealers.

That meant I wound up heading north on the 405 into the teeth of Friday gridlock, and the frustration was simply driving me nuts.

Just looking at the SMZ's monstrous tires and brakes, its radical red bodywork and its handcrafted intake plumbing gave me the kind of giggles usually

reserved for mad scientists who rub their hands together in delight while vowing to

*"teach those simple fools at MIT a thing or two!"* I couldn't wait to see what

performance gains Millen's black magic had produced, but

sitting there in traffic all I could do was remind

myself of what a very wise man

once told me:

*"You must have patience to*

*learn to control the power of the*

*force."* (Okay, so it was Yoda.)

If nothing else, at

least the stop-and-go traffic of a blistering

LA afternoon gave me the

opportunity to reflect on how much

fun the standard turbo Z-car, which I'd been testing for comparison all the week before, had been. That machine combines impressive controllability with enough torque to yank your head back and soundly smoke the tires. Even

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more remarkable is the standard Z's ability to accelerate at higher speeds, to push you back in your seat. Combine this powerplant with the platform's excellent handling and notable comfort level and you've got a car that's still a serious contender some five-plus years into its lifespan.

## **Class Action**

As good as the standard Z-car is, however, it's been around long enough that most folks are now pretty blasé about all it has to offer. And while Nissan would love to pump some more excitement into the car—after all, the Z still gives them a big chunk of their performance credibility—the cost of making any big changes would never get past the finance boys back home.

Enter Steve Millen. His Stillen firm's tuner-made, factory-blessed hotrod seems guaranteed to reignite enthusiasts' Z-car passion at a minimum of cost to the factory. Wisely shunning the not-invented-here syndrome and encouraging (rather than damping) Stillen's motive madness, in return for little more than its own good intentions Nissan gets a showroom traffic builder, a major magazine-ink magnet and a genuine performance supercar to add to its lineup. Stillen had to deal with all the development woes, and they're the ones who'll take the PR fallout if anything goes amiss: Seems like a win-win decision for Nissan, and hopefully one that others will follow.

No matter how it gets to the customer, a car that looks like the SMZ brings out the competitive spirit in all of us; everybody from secretaries to Jaguar XJS drivers wanted to race the SMZ through Los Angeles' 15-mph traffic. Just north of town the highways finally lightened up, and one particular chap in an older Porsche Carrera decided he'd give it a go; "block the Stillen" was his game of choice, speeding up to fill any open roadway and swerving left to right to make sure I couldn't pass him when opportunities finally arose.

Finally, three open lanes of concrete beckoned: Not having reached full boost in the SMZ yet I was a bit leery of merely sucking his doors off in one pass, but after



*Saving maybe the weight of a Snickers bar, Stillen's pedal drilling does impress the kids.*

the persistent Hessian roadblock ignored a few friendly pass-to-flash signals I ran out of patience. "Screw Yoda," I thought to myself. "This is war."

Drop from fourth to third, hit the gas, pop right and point: The Stillen jumped forward with such scalding alacrity I could barely make out the vanquished Porsche driver's rising forearm and middle finger, which he was no doubt preparing for use in the task of changing radio stations. That mad-scientist giggle slowly came back once again, and anybody with a cellular phone on that particular stretch of highway could have easily called the CHP to report a red blur shooting past them with an Ed Roth cartoon character at the wheel, its eyes bulging wide and a long, flapping tongue leaving drool marks down the window.

## **External Agitators**

Though not one of Stillen's maximum-output screambombs, the SMZ still employs enough of the firm's hardware to boost output from an already healthy 300 bhp to an

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oversteer if you get into the gas too aggressively, but the transition is pretty easy to control—more entertaining than threatening.



eye-popping 365. The twin turbochargers and intercoolers are the same units used on the stock ZX, but now they breathe through a high-flow airbox and new intake manifold. Spent gasses are vented out a new low-restriction exhaust system and two

additional pounds of boost round out the package. The strictly external nature of these mods allow the SMZ to keep Nissan's factory warranty, something more radical surgery wouldn't have permitted.

Most importantly, it's easy to feel the Stillen's extra power behind the wheel. While the 0-60 run is only down by about a quarter of a second, the SMZ's real gains come in the area of midrange flexibility. In-gear acceleration is now markedly stronger than that of the stock car, so real-world performance has improved significantly; the SMZ always seems to be running for triple-digit speeds, and a lusty shove in the back greets you from low revolutions that would have brought a moment's hesitation from the stock ZX powerplant.

The SMZ's increased output also underscores its uprated grip and handling. Nissan's standard 2-position shock absorbers remain, but stiffer progressive-rate springs, thicker antiroll bars and a new wheel package consisting of airy Yokohama AVS 17x9-inch front and 18x9.5-inch rear

rims completely change the posture over the road. Steering inputs are translated into motion more quickly than before and grip at the rear is significantly enhanced.

Only on poor surfaces—where the rear end now breaks away with even more gusto and the front can tramline over ruts and grooves—does the SMZ treatment suffer. Elsewhere, the increased grip and tauter ride feel like perfect complements to the Stillen's added power; this Z-car will still swing into power-induced oversteer if you get into the gas too aggressively, but the transition is pretty easy to control—more entertaining than threatening.

## Party Uniform

Racer that he is, Steve Millen borrowed existing hardware from Nissan's home-market Skyline GTR Group N racer for the SMZ's brakes. The crossdrilled and vented rotors work with larger calipers and pistons to achieve stopping power that's strong, progressive and fade-free. Late-braking your way into corners becomes more com-



## While the rear spoiler goes a bit far

the rocker moldings, aggressive new airdam and trademark vented schnozz panel are slick enough to look like genuine factory pieces.



*Still stock in its guts, cleaning up the intake and exhaust tracts drags out another 65 horses.*

# Even the drilled metal pedals cry out

to nascent Walter Mitty types. Visually the SMZ is always in good humor and usually in good taste.

fortable than before and the Z-car's traditionally hard pedal at last seems in keeping with the rest of the package.

The larger rubber patches the Stillen puts on the road also translate into weightier steering, which continues to load up as cornering speeds rise and the wide Yokohama tires settle into work. While it might prove tiring over time, for short Banzai bursts the added heft adds a new level of excitement and a certain boy-racer charm.

It's hard to avoid daydreams of glory behind this particular steering wheel, and the biggest brain tease comes from the visual stimulation. Stillen's external aero goodies are distinctive and tasteful, and while the rear spoiler goes a bit far for my tastes the rocker moldings, aggressive new airdam and trademark vented schnozz panel are slick enough to look like genuine factory

pieces. Inside, Stillen's decoration kit of carbon fiber door, dash and shifter trim looks undeniably classy, and even the drilled metal pedals cry out to nascent Walter Mitty types. Visually the SMZ is always in good humor and usually in good taste—especially in this particular shade of 500-kilowatt red.

Whether all these niceties are worth an extra \$14,000 or so beyond the already steep price of a 300ZX Twin Turbo is something that only potential Stillactites can decide, but you'd be hard pressed to outfit your own Z-car this well for anything near the price. The truth is, if your burning passion is to own the most exciting factory-blessed Z-car of all time, tacking the cost of a new Saturn coupe onto the Twin Turbo's original sticker will be a fairly minor deterrent. ●



## SPECIFICATIONS

### Stillen SMZ

#### General

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive coupe  
Structure: steel unibody  
Market as tested: United States  
MSRP: \$59,000  
Airbag: std., driver and passenger

#### Engine

Type: longitudinally-mounted V6, iron block and aluminum heads  
Displacement (cc): 2960  
Compression ratio: 8.5:1  
Horsepower (bhp): 365 @ 6400 rpm  
Torque (lbs. ft.): 332 @ 3500 rpm  
Intake system: SEFI with two intercooled turbochargers  
Valvetrain: two overhead cams per bank, four valves per cylinder

#### Transmission

Type: 5-speed manual  
Ratios:  
1st: 3.21  
2nd: 1.93  
3rd: 1.30  
4th: 1.00  
5th: 0.75  
Final drive: 3.69

#### Dimensions

Curb weight (lbs.): 3575 (est.)  
Wheelbase (in.): 96.5  
Track, f/r (in.): 58.9/60.4  
Length (in.): 169.5  
Width (in.): 70.5

#### Suspension, brakes, steering

Suspension, front: multilink upper/A-arm lower with coil springs and antiroll bar  
Suspension, rear: multilink upper/A-arm lower with coil springs and antiroll bar  
Steering type: rack and pinion, power assisted  
Wheels, f&r (in.): 17x9 & 18x9.5 (Yokohama)  
Tires, f&r: 255/40ZR17 & 265/35ZR18 (Yokohama)  
Brakes, f/r: 11.8-inch vented disc/11.3-inch vented disc  
ABS: std.

#### Performance

0-60 (sec.): 5.5  
1/4-mile (sec.): 13.9 @ 105 mph