



PHOTOGRAPHY: AARON KILEY

Nissan 200SX SE

Three years, two cylinders, and 200 pounds later.

• There are no fat cats in the asphalt jungle. These days, all the car companies are circling for the next kill as if the sales bonanza of 1986 never happened. Nearly every automaker is hungry, skittish, and well aware that the competition is the fiercest in history. This could be the year in which there are more new cars than car buyers.

When the going gets tough, the tough start tuning—which is the Nissan 200SX's story for 1987 exactly. The sports-coupe segment that the 200SX competes in is as densely packed as a New York City subway train at rush hour—and all the riders have fangs. The Celica GT-S, the Prelude Si, the Merkur XR4Ti, and many other sedans stalking enthusiast buyers are bristling with performance, handling, and technology. "We even want the 200SX to appeal to the person who wants a Mustang GT or Camaro Z28," says Nissan product planner Sheldon Payne. Talk about predators in the tall grass.

Not one of the 200SX's rivals has stood still since the current version of Nissan's sporty two-plus-two arrived on the scene in 1984. Progress has forged ahead on all fronts, from horsepower to handling, from seats to spoilers. Do nothing and you slide inexorably backward.

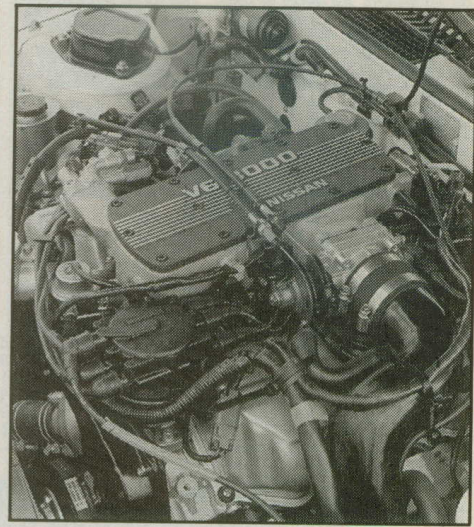
Nissan's answer to these advances is a thorough updating of the 200SX. Going on three years old, the design is still too

new to send to the crusher, so a personal-ity transplant has been attempted instead.

You fans of big American iron will appreciate the thinking behind the new top-of-the-line 200SX SE: "Nothing beats cubic inches." Last year's hottest SX was the Turbo, which was pumped along by a game 120-hp, 1.8-liter turbocharged four-cylinder. For 1987, the small four and its attendant turbo plumbing have been replaced by Nissan's well-known 3.0-liter V-6. This normally aspirated powerplant produces a healthy 160 hp at 5200 rpm with the help of aluminum cylinder heads, single overhead camshafts, and Nissan port fuel injection. The new motor puts 40 more hp under your right foot—a resounding 33-percent improvement over the turbo four.

"To be honest," says Payne, "the Turbo's throttle-response characteristics were not what we wanted them to be. At first there's nothing, and then it just comes on! If you lived with one, like I did for a couple of years, it really got to be a bit of a pain."

The right-now responsiveness of the normally aspirated 3.0-liter motor was only one of the elements that Nissan U.S.A. was after when it instigated the 200SX revamp. The other requests wired back to the home office, says Payne, were aimed at "getting a more performance-



oriented automobile into the line. The buyers of the Turbo were more gadget-and-gizmo-oriented."

Those folks interested in the tepid four-cylinder base model can celebrate with a round of Shirley Temples, because it's still available, too. It's called the XE now and has more standard equipment than before. Anyone with an ounce of premium unleaded in his veins, however, will prefer the more purposeful V-6 SE.

The SE moves the 200SX a step closer to the German ideal of functionalism. Germans prefer cars that are the equivalent of children who are seen but not heard—automobiles that get the job done without gimmickry or theatrics.

Very much along those lines, the thing you notice most about the latest 200SX is that you don't notice it so much anymore. Outside, the look has been tightened up by paring off the Turbo's awkward hood scoop and going to a simple paint scheme. Everything below knee level—including the bumpers, the rocker-panel extensions, and the new, deeper front air dam—is revised. New alloy wheels have been added for good measure. Everything above knee level is painted a single hue—Ferrari red in the case of our test car. The finished product isn't so beautiful that Giorgetto Giugiaro will leap from the roof of Ital Design in a fit of despair, but it's relatively clean and aggressive.

Inside, the SE subscribes to the less-is-more philosophy. The old astigmatism-test upholstery is gone, replaced with an attempt at a conservative, dual-color velour; alas, it's as fuzzy as a couch from a bargain-furniture outlet. The front buckets are straightforward, offering backrest-angle and lumbar adjustments. The Turbo's wimpy two-spoke steering wheel has been replaced by a more substantial three-spoker. The standard 25-watt-per-channel stereo is simplicity itself. And, best of all, the optional Tokyo-by-night digi-dash is history. Easily readable needle-and-number gauges, plus a few warning lights, get the job done nicely.



The 200SX certainly *looks* as if it will get down to business—but this is a two-part exam, and there are no trick questions. Sure, appearances count, but a racy two-plus-two has got to drive like a million if it's going to be taken seriously.

Where the reality meets the road, the 200SX SE proves to be better than before but far from king of the jungle. The V-6 makes seductive sounds and has it all over the turbo four in smoothness and crisp response. Despite its 40-hp vitamin injection, though, the SE's quarter-mile clocking of 16.5 seconds at 84 mph isn't a nanosecond quicker than the Turbo's.

Part of the problem is that the SE is some 200 pounds heftier than the Turbo, thanks to the new V-6 powerplant and the stouter driveline parts required to withstand the engine's greater torque. Bulking up like this does not qualify as progress in our book. Even at a solidly packed 3005 pounds, though, the SE has a significantly better power-to-weight ratio than the Turbo did, so its performance should be better. We suspect a lazy engine.

Nor does the SE soar to new heights on the road. The front buckets could stand to be recontoured for more support. Although the suspension has been tightened up and the 60-series tires are fatter by ten millimeters, the SE's joy level is strictly average. The chassis hides no nasty vices, but there are a host of sportsters that offer better down-the-road tracking and more confidence in the corners. The SE did turn in a spectacular stopping distance—176 feet from 70 mph—but aside from this one feat, it earns no gold stars.

This kind of report card places the 200SX SE about dead center in the two-plus-two class. Three years, two cylinders, and 200 pounds later, it's still plugging along—trying hard, but lacking that elusive spark of brilliance. The SE is plenty good enough to survive in the asphalt jungle, but ruling it is another matter.

—Rich Ceppos



Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2+2-passenger, 3-door coupe

Price as tested: \$15,744

Options on test car: base Nissan 200SX SE, \$14,499; air conditioning, \$770; two-tone paint, \$250; freight, \$225

Standard accessories: power steering, windows, and locks, tilt steering, rear defroster and wiper

Sound system: AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette, 4 speakers

ENGINE

Type V-6, iron block and aluminum heads
 Bore x stroke 3.43 x 3.27 in, 87.0 x 83.0mm
 Displacement 9.0:1
 Compression ratio 181 cu in, 2960cc
 Engine-control system Nissan ECCS with port fuel injection
 Emissions controls 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control, EGR
 Valve gear chain-belt-driven single overhead cams
 Power (SAE net) 160 bhp @ 5200 rpm
 Torque (SAE net) 174 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
 Redline 6100 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission 5-speed
 Final-drive ratio 3.70:1

Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	3.32	5.7	35 mph (6100 rpm)
II	1.90	10.0	61 mph (6100 rpm)
III	1.31	14.5	88 mph (6100 rpm)
IV	1.00	19.0	116 mph (6100 rpm)
V	0.76	25.0	122 mph (4900 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 95.5 in
 Track, F/R 55.5/56.5 in
 Length 175.6 in
 Width 65.7 in
 Height 52.4 in

Ground clearance 6.1 in
 Curb weight 3005 lb
 Weight distribution, F/R 55.0/45.0%
 Fuel capacity 14.0 gal
 Oil capacity 4.5 qt
 Water capacity 9.6 qt

CHASSIS/BODY

Type unit construction with 2 rubber-isolated crossmembers
 Body material welded steel stampings

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat 52 cu ft
 rear seat 24 cu ft
 trunk space 17 cu ft
 Front seats bucket
 Seat adjustments fore and aft, seatback angle, lumbar support
 General comfort poor fair **good** excellent
 Fore-and-aft support poor fair **good** excellent
 Lateral support poor fair **good** excellent

SUSPENSION

F: ind, strut located by one trailing link and one lateral link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
 R: ind, semi-trailing arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar

STEERING

Type rack-and-pinion, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock 2.9
 Turning circle curb-to-curb 32.2 ft

BRAKES

F: 10.8 x 0.9-in vented disc
 R: 11.4 x 0.4-in disc
 Power assist vacuum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size 6.0 x 15 in
 Wheel type cast aluminum
 Tires Bridgestone Regno GR-03, 205/60HR-15
 Test inflation pressures, F/R 28/28 psi

CAR AND DRIVER TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	2.7
40 mph	4.2
50 mph	6.2
60 mph	8.6
70 mph	11.6
80 mph	15.1
90 mph	20.2
100 mph	26.1
110 mph	35.0
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph	9.0
50-70 mph	10.0
Standing 1/4-mile	16.5 sec @ 84 mph
Top speed	122 mph

BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup 176 ft
 Modulation poor fair **good** excellent
 Fade none moderate heavy
 Front-rear balance poor fair **good**

HANDLING

Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad 0.79 g
 Understeer minimal **moderate** excessive

COAST-DOWN MEASUREMENTS

Road horsepower @ 30 mph 5 hp
 50 mph 13 hp
 70 mph 28 hp

FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city driving 19 mpg
 EPA highway driving 26 mpg
 C/D observed fuel economy 17 mpg

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle 44 dBA
 Full-throttle acceleration 75 dBA
 70-mph cruising 70 dBA
 70-mph coasting 69 dBA