

DATSON SPL-310 ROAD TEST

by Bob McVay, *Assistant Technical Editor*

AUTOMOBILES made in the Land of the Rising Sun aren't too commonplace on American highways, but they're being imported in ever-increasing numbers. One such automobile is Datsun's three-seater sports car, the SPL-310, formerly known as the Fairlady. Quite a few detail changes

and additions have taken the Datsun out of the *Lady* class and make it more appealing and interesting to the man of the house.

After nearly 800 miles behind the wheel of Datsun's sports car, we got the impression that it's more of a sports-touring car than a sports-racing car, although a few of the older Fairlady models *are* being raced. Bearing this in mind, we found the Datsun fun to drive and easy to get acquainted with. Many things could make this car the first sports machine of someone just entering the ranks of the smitten. It has all the usual appurtenances: a four-speed gearbox, convertible top, a full array of instruments, and that drive-by-the-seat-of-your-pants feel that only a sports car can give.

One big factor that makes the SPL-310 a potential first sports car is its attractively low showroom price. Completely equipped with a pushbutton radio, three bucket seats, a full tonneau cover, an excellent heater/ventilator system, white sidewalls, windshield washer, and electric clock, the Datsun's full selling price is \$2465, plus normal taxes and license fees. Taking into consideration the car's good road manners and 1500cc engine, it's probably the lowest priced fully equipped sports car in its engine capacity class.

The Datsun is manufactured by the Nissan Manufacturing Company, one of Japan's largest, while most of the engine components (alternator, carburetors, etc.) are made by the Hitachi Company for Datsun.



Fully loaded, the Datsun has a favorable weight distribution, with 51 per cent on the front wheels. We found its handling very easy to get used to. Most of the time, the car would telegraph its intentions. It never broke loose suddenly, even when pushed hard through corners. Handling was good up to the point of rear-end breakaway. Even when we got it sideways in a corner, it was controllable and easy to recover safely.

There's nothing unusual about the Datsun's suspension arrangement. It has double wishbones with coil springs and an anti-roll bar in front, with semi-elliptic springs in the rear and tubular, double-acting shocks at each corner. Ride is on the firm side, especially at the rear. The semi-elliptic springs looked more straight than semi-elliptical and didn't allow much up-and-down movement. We could feel every road irregularity and had to slow down for the bigger dips.

Except for a noticeable vibration at exactly 2500 rpm, the Datsun's ohv Four is a smooth, willing engine. We could lug down to 1500 rpm in fourth and then pick up speed without a complaint. From 3500 rpm on up to its 6000-rpm red line, the engine really comes on; below 3500 rpm, high-gear response is nothing to get excited about. Shifting at 4000 rpm gives adequate performance for around town, but taking it up to the 5500-rpm red zone is lots more fun.

The engine mounts two Hitachi carburetors (made under license from British SU patterns) and develops its top horsepower at 5600 rpm. In addition to the added carburetor, the SPL-310's engine sports bigger valve stems, a higher 9-to-1 compression ratio, and an alternator as standard equipment. Other features include aluminum-alloy pistons with chrome-plated rings and wedge-shaped combustion chambers.

The close-ratio gearbox gives ratios of 3.515, 2.140, 1.328, and 1.000 in first, second, third, and fourth respectively. First isn't synchromesh — the top three are. A single dry disc clutch transmits power through a final 3.89 axle ratio. With two men and our equipment on board, the Datsun tipped the scales at better than 2600 pounds.

Coming off the line at Riverside Raceway, the Datsun climbed to 30, 45, and 60 mph in 4.5, 8.5, and 14.3 seconds respectively. It ran through our quarter-mile test strip in 19.7 seconds, stopping the Weston electric speedometer at 70 mph and tach at 5800 rpm in top gear, for a top speed of 94. Shifting just above 5600 rpm gave us our best results for top acceleration. Needless to say, the Datsun had plenty of zip for keeping up with normal traffic and ahead of most of it.

However, the wide spacing between second and third gears gave us some cause for concern when we downshifted to second for a turn (with the tachometer reading 3800 rpm in third). The tach soared right off the end of the red line. Quick clutch action prevented a blown engine, but it did point out necessary precautions when cornering the car in a sporting manner. We had to either chug through the turn

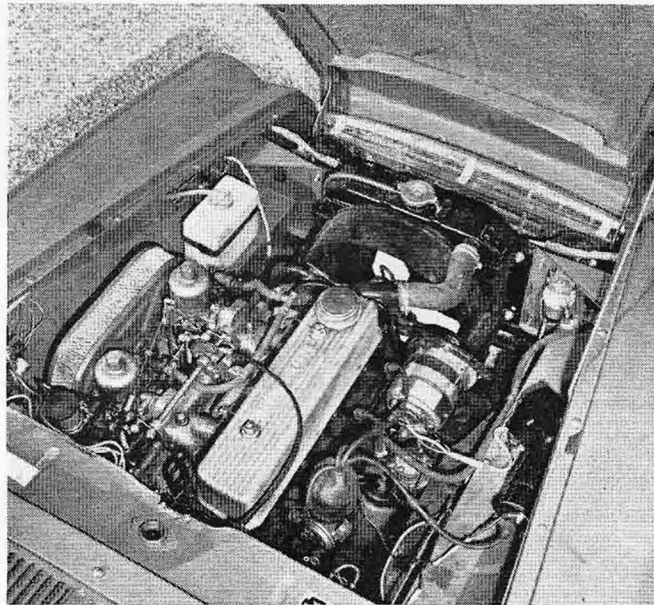


PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO, PAT BROLIER

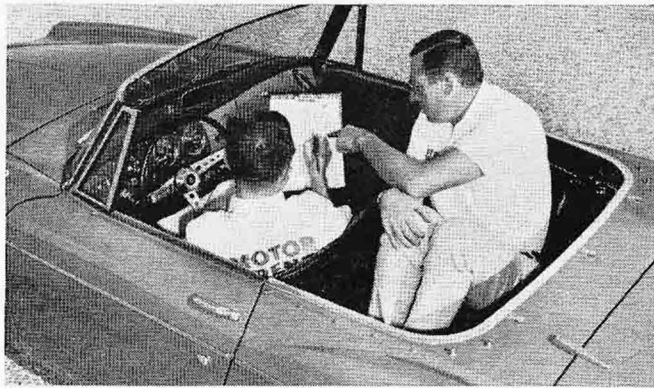


(OPPOSITE) Car showed fine directional stability and control at high speed. Top didn't bow much, noise level was minimal.

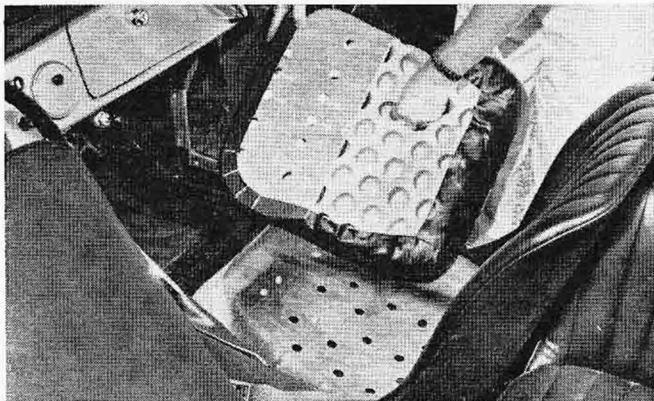
- 1) Sports car's styling blends equally well with oriental or modern architecture found in the Southern California test area.
- 2) Engine idles smoothly, pulled willingly during acceleration.
- 3) Brakes' stopping power was average by sedan standards but ended on low scale for sports cars. Nissan is now in the process of testing disc brakes for future Datsun SPL-310 roadsters.



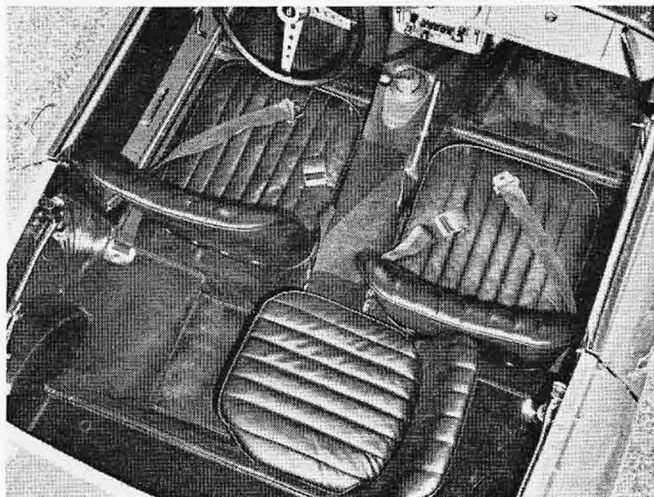
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at 3800 rpm in third or roar through at 6000 rpm in second. We feel the 2350-rpm jump was a bit too much for top performance.

With only 2.2 turns lock to lock, the Datsun responded to our slightest wheel adjustment. At speeds below 20 mph, it felt quite heavy, but it lightened up at higher speeds and offered good control even during our most violent maneuvers. At high speeds, directional stability was good; it didn't seem overly sensitive to crosswinds.

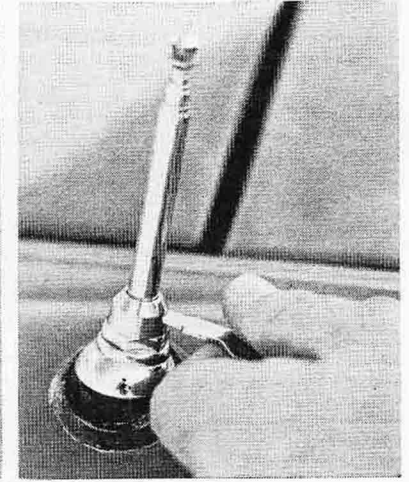
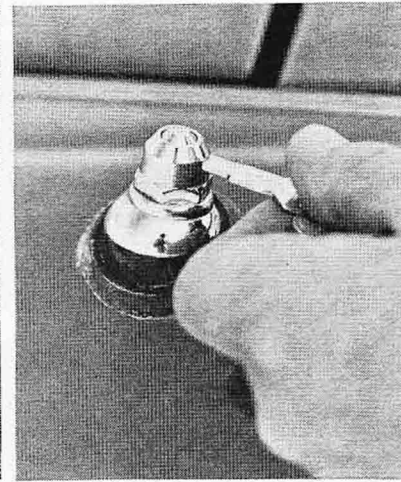
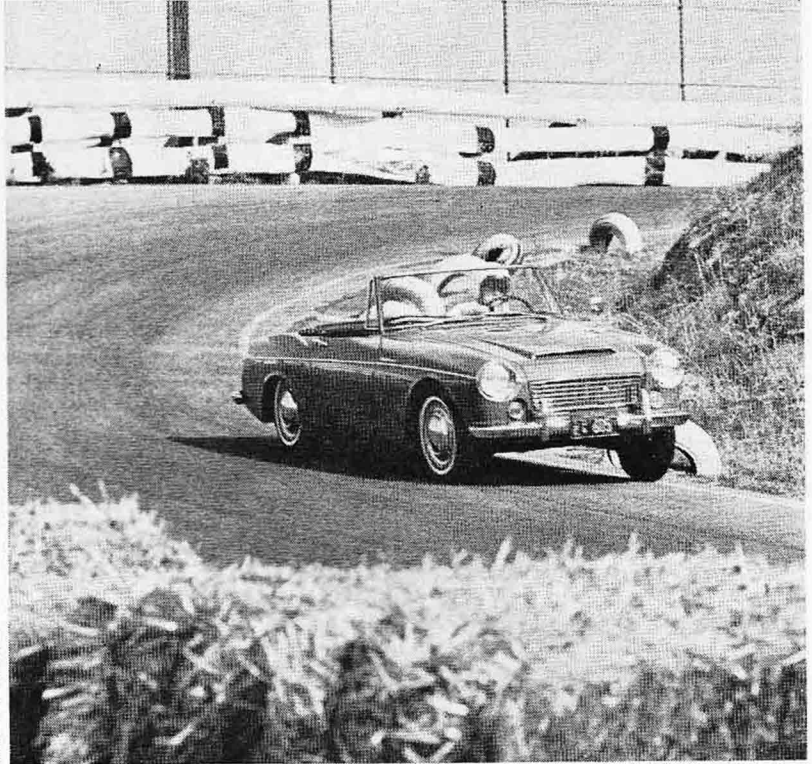
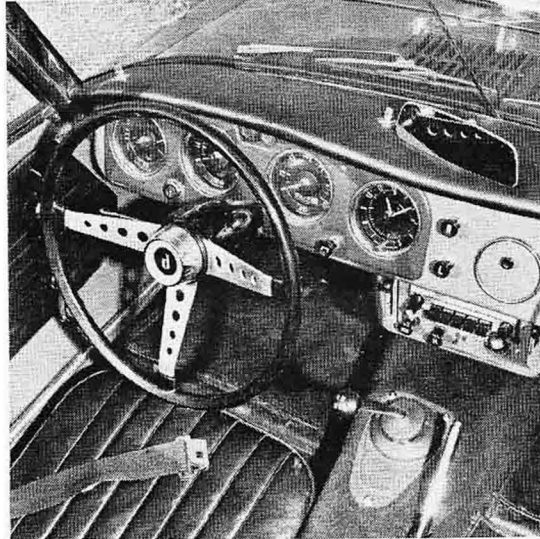
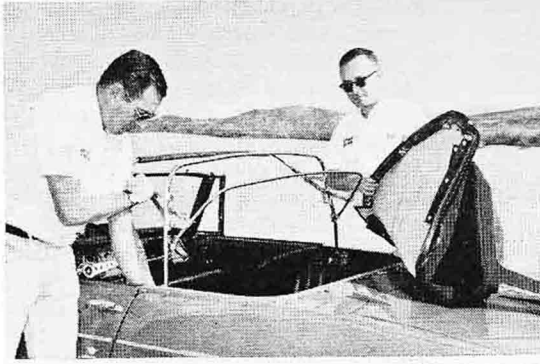
About the only category where the Datsun doesn't quite come up to expectations is in braking. It uses nine-inch drums all around. Disc brakes are planned for next year's offerings, but for now, our braking test found the car capable of a 32-foot stop from 30 mph and a 166-foot distance from 60. Hard braking from high speeds found the brakes fading and, although they were perfectly adequate for normal driving, anyone considering the Datsun for serious competition would want to look into better brakes. Our test car had a strong tendency to pull to the left on hard stops.

The SPL-310 does pretty much what a sports-touring car is supposed to do and provides many creature comforts, just like others in its class. Gas mileage depended on how the car was driven, with a performance-testing low of 13.5, stop-and-go city driving average of 17 mpg, and our best figure of 24.5, giving an overall average of 18.8.

Inside, we found the Datsun quite complete in creature comforts, with three bucket seats, one crosswise in the rear for a third rider. The car has an adequate set of easy-to-read instruments, but we'd prefer gauges for oil pressure and battery charge. Standard equipment includes one of the best heating/ventilation systems we've used on a sports roadster. It should prove equal to any climate. Only a few gusts of air got into the interior of the car at cruising speeds. We found it quite snug. A grab-handle is provided for the passenger's peace of mind during vigorous maneuvers. There's also a usable and lockable glove compartment, but no center console. Thank heaven, too, for roll-up windows. Tall passengers will have to stoop or risk bumping their heads with the top up, but even the taller ones have adequate leg room in front. Naturally, the rear seat will go to the shortest of the three.

As a first sports car for the enthusiast, a second car for the family, or even as an only car, the Datsun SPL-310 should fill the bill nicely. We found it well detailed and well put together. It seems to offer quite a value for its price as a fully equipped, 1500cc sports-touring automobile. It's no racing car in standard form, but Datsun parts depots can take care of necessary changes if the SPL-310 owner decides to trade in his sporting cap for a safety helmet. /MT

- 1) Datsun mounts twin SU-like Hitachi carbs, has alternator as standard equipment. Car started quickly, was always smooth.
- 2) Third person is much more comfortable with top removed.
- 3) Fiberglass shell and deep foam padding lend seating comfort.
- 4) The Datsun seating offers honest room for three passengers.
- 5) Adequate trunk accepts medium-sized luggage and soft bags.
- 6) Putting top up is easy for two people, takes somewhat more effort from one. Top bows are unusual in that they're chromed.
- 7) Dash is clean and functional, with easy-to-read dials and gauges. Everything proved easy to reach, including excellent heater/defroster/ventilation system and the precise shift lever.
- 8) On the track, Datsun's handling was always predictable and controllable—very close to neutral right up to the point of breakaway. We appreciated the quick 2.2-turn steering ratio.
- 9) Car features novel vandal-proof radio antenna that can be pushed in flush with fender. Inserting key in slot pops it up for normal use. The options include fiberglass rigid hard top.



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DATSUN SPL-310

2-door, 3-passenger roadster

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Pushbutton radio, heater, tonneau cover, back-up lights, whitewalls, seat belts

BASIC PRICE: \$2465 p.o.e. (includes accessories)

PRICE AS TESTED: \$2465 (plus tax and license)

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 3487 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 6000 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....	4.5 secs.
0-45 mph.....	8.5
0-60 mph.....	14.3

Standing start 1/4-mile 19.7 secs. and 70 mph

Speeds in gears @ 6000 rpm

1st	27 mph	3rd	72 mph
2nd	44 mph	4th	94 mph
			(@ 5800 rpm)

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	30	45	50	61	71	81
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear16.7 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 42 ft.; from 60 mph, 166 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

Ohv in-line 4
Bore: 3.15 ins.
Stroke: 2.91 ins.
Displacement: 90.7 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 9.0:1
Horsepower: 85 @ 5600 rpm
Torque: 92.0 lbs.-ft. @ 4400 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.94
Carburetion: 2 single-barrels
Ignition: 12-volt coil

Gearbox

4-speed manual (top 3 synchro);
floor-mounted lever

Driveshaft

1-piece, open tube

Differential

Hypoid, semi-floating
Standard ratio: 3.89:1

Suspension

Front: Independent (ball joint),
with double wishbones, coil
springs, tubular shocks, and
anti-roll bar
Rear: Rigid axle, with semi-
elliptic springs, tubular shocks

Steering

Cam and lever
Turning diameter: 32 ft.
Turns lock to lock: 2.2

Wheels and Tires

4-Jug, pressed steel wheels
5.60 x 13 4-ply tires

Brakes

Hydraulic
Front: 9-in. dia. x 1.6 in wide;
2 leading shoe (dual cylinder)
Rear: 9-in. dia. x 1.6 in. wide,
leading and trailing shoe (single
cylinder)
Effective lining area: 109.0
sq. ins.

Body and Frame

Separate steel body on X-member
frame
Wheelbase: 89.8 ins.
Track: front, 47.8 ins.;
rear, 47.1 ins.
Overall length: 155.6 ins.
Overall width: 58.9 ins.
Curb weight: 2081 lbs.