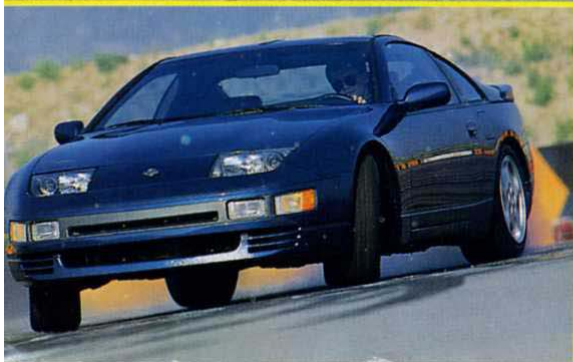


EXPOSED: FIVE SECRET CHRYSLERS
PLUS FIREBIRD FIREHAWK, PRIZM VS TRACER, NEW GALANT

MOTOR TREND

SUPERCAR SHOOTOUT



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34809
JULY 1993
USA \$2.95
CANADA \$3.95
NEWSSTAND
EDITION



P

hases of immense technological acceleration clobber many aspects of modern life. Personal computers are obsolete before you get rid of the plastic peanuts in which they're packed. Cutting-edge audiophiles were replacing compact disc collections with minidisks before the Goodwill truck could pick up their LPs.

The shock of having your \$35,000 super-sports car compared to an eight-track tape player can be topped only by

that of a certain Persian Gulf despot when his radar network gives no warning of the latest invisible airplanes. But sports cars are different from military aircraft, despite our incessant analogies.

Few owners truly will be impacted by a new model with a quarter-second edge in 0-60-mph acceleration, 0.05 g more cornering power, or a 6-foot-shorter 0-60 stopping distance. Most are more than satisfied with their pride and joy's prodigious and rarely tapped potential.

Still, a main reason one buys a super-sports car is to pos-

**COVER
STORY**

THE

FASTEST

FROM THE

FAR EAST



sess the strongest, the fastest, the best. So, before the stakes are raised again, we assembled the past, present, and future Japanese sports car champions. Heading the lineup is the first to boost the technology to orbital velocities, the Nissan 300ZX Turbo, which we named '90 Import Car of the Year. Then came the Mitsubishi 3000GT VR-4, the '91 Import Car of the Year award-winner. The Acura NSX wasn't produced in sufficient quantities to be ICOY-eligible, but soon after its appearance, we called it "the best sports car ever produced." Just as we'd exhausted our quota of absolutes, Mazda intro-

duced its light and powerful RX-7, the unanimous choice for '93 Import Car of the Year. And when one staffer related a first wondrous experience with the '94 Toyota Supra Turbo, some wouldn't believe the ante could be upped again. Early in our testing program, one editor said, "It's going to be a challenge to find a loser, much less a winner, in this bunch." If you must have a winner, strict objective performance is as good a criterion (and overlooks and underplays as many factors) as any. The unqualified winner on the test and racetracks: the Toyota Supra Turbo. Save for top speed, the Supra Turbo topped every major objective performance category. When asked which we'd choose as our only daily driver, the Toyota earned a comfortable first place and also won our subjective Fun-Factor poll, while the RX-7 topped the our Bang for the Buck assessment. When we asked which of these our editors would recommend to someone who lacked experience in super-high performance cars, the 3000GT VR-4 won with the Supra Turbo nipping at its heels. Yet with all this big-caliber power grouped tightly in the X-ring, each is an excitement bull's-eye. Regardless of the ranking system, we'd be tickled to have the last-place car in our garage.

NEW

**TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO
UPS THE ANTE AGAINST
ACURA NSX,
MAZDA RX-7,
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4,
& NISSAN 300ZX TURBO**

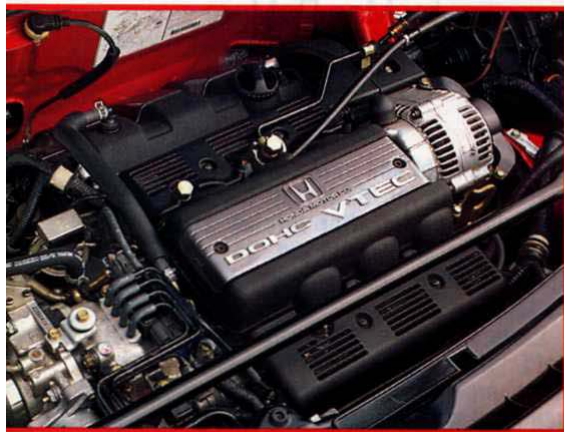
by Mac DeMere

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK GRAVES AND SCOTT KILLEEN

ACURA NSX



Testament to the efficiency of the NSX 270-horsepower 3.0-liter V-6: It's the only normally aspirated engine in the field; the others need two turbochargers to compete.



Excellence can't be quantified. Not by performance numbers, racetrack lap time, a checklist of features, nor even a computerized ride data graph. While it sounds too New Age for our conservative comfort, you must feel the goodness of a sports car to know it. There are faster cars, more comfortable cars, ones with many more features, certainly cheaper (and vastly more expensive) ones, yet none offers an all-round better sensation than does the NSX. What do you expect from a car that lists Ayrton Senna and Bobby Rahal among its development drivers?

"This is the best driving experience available from anywhere in the world today," said one editor, being moderate for the adulation that's been heaped upon the NSX. Yet, perhaps because this continuous veneration has boosted expectations unreachably high (to the point that those new to the NSX expect something like the final scene from "It's a Wonderful Life"), some are more reserved in their praise. "I'm not as impressed as I thought I'd be," said a first-time NSX driver.

Indicative of Honda's dedication to perfection in designing the NSX is the exhaustive weight-reduction program: The entire chassis and body is aluminum, as are the suspension's upper and lower control arms and uprights, while the connecting rods are titanium. Rightfully satisfied with their offspring, for '93 the NSX is little changed beyond the addition of a passenger-side airbag, a pyrotechnic seatbelt tensioner, and in a futile effort to quiet whining auto writers, a center console incorporating difficult-to-use cupholders.

Take a peek at our notebooks: "As easy and undemanding to drive as an Accord when you're not driving hard, yet packs world-class capabilities." "It has addictive engine sounds, great shift feel, very livable interior, a superior combination of ride and handling, and wonderful steering feel. Mind if I take another week making my assessment?" "One of the easiest to place in fast turns—and keep placed while drifting." "The attention you get from other drivers makes you feel like a rock star, but one with excellent taste for a change." "The NSX is a joy to drive."

Yet, for the second time in as many tests, we literally ripped the tread off one of its rear tires during racetrack lapping. Other complaints include poor rearward visibility, high steering effort at low speed, and the highest price in the test by \$30,000. And we'd love another 30 horsepower.

Still we believe, as one editor said, the NSX "is a triumph of a dedicated pursuit of excellence, and the standard by which all sports cars must be judged."



With prodigious performance in a petite package, the RX-7 makes you feel like a racing hero, but the optional R1 suspension pounds your spine.

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e've often dreamed of driving a single-seat race car down our favorite backroad. So, apparently, have Mazda's designers. The RX-7 is like driving a Formula car with a three-year/50,000-mile warranty. With such enormous, nimble performance, hustling the RX-7 up a sinewy mountain road

makes you feel like Rudolf Caracciola on the old Nürburgring or, perhaps, Jim Clark at Spa-Francorchamps. And it's such a willing and polite dance partner it almost never compares your performance to those racing legends.

Listen to our editors gush: "What a massive hoot! The RX-7 feels as nimble as a racing kart, yet is progressive and stable." "One of the best racetrack production cars ever built." "Light weight, big tires, responsive engine, great chassis, big brakes, and perfect driving position all add up to a wonderful backroad or racetrack car." "Small size and extreme maneuverability make it a blast on even the narrowest mountain road."

The Supra's acceleration advantage gives it a tiny edge in racetrack lapping, though the margin is so small one of our two race drivers got around faster in the RX-7 than in the turbo Toyota. If you could chop and channel the long straight from the track, it's likely the RX-7 would retain its King of the Hot Lappers title.

Our test car had the no-compromise R1 package, highlighted by rock-hard shocks. Unless you consider 0.3 seconds a major segment of time, as do racers and autocrossers, you'll never notice its performance advantage over the base suspension. However, everyone notices the ride penalty exacted by the R1 suspension. "A 30-mile trip on the decaying concrete freeways of Los Angeles is cruel and unusual punishment." "A two-position suspension setting option, like the 300ZX's, would be a good addition." "I feel Toyota did a better job of building a super-sports car that doesn't beat up its occupants." Yet one staffer was made of sterner stuff: "Ride in the R1 is rough but not unbearable."

The RX-7's technical highlights include dual-sequential turbochargers, a Torsen differential, super-sticky Bridgestone Expedia S07 tires, and the lightest weight in the test by about 200 pounds. As the RX-7 was introduced as a '93 model, there are no changes from the version that first graced our Dec. '91 cover and, later, won the '93 Import Car of the Year Award.

Excuse us now, we must go for a spin in the RX-7. Have you seen our Alain Prost impression?



MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4



Attention, all free-agents switching from the Los Angeles Rams and San Diego Chargers to the Denver Broncos: The 3000GT VR-4 is the best choice in this test for you.



We love to talk about how these super cars behaved when we pushed them to edge of the performance envelope—in the semi-safe confines of race and test tracks, of course. Fortunately, few owners ever intentionally explore the limits on public roads. So, while not as entertaining on the racetrack as its rear-

drive opposition, the 3000GT VR-4's all-wheel-drive system makes it excel in the real-world survival tests—like when your favorite onramp has been coated with anti-freeze, or that backroad sweeper sprouts a stream on its far side, or a symphony of esses finishes with a surprise hairpin flourish.

Though it ranked last in Fun Factor voting, the 3000GT VR-4 easily won the nod as the car we'd recommend to someone who lacks experience in high-performance cars, or if we had to hustle over an unfamiliar mountain road with the anti-venom serum for a dying child. The farther from thinking like race drivers on a track and the closer to thinking like real owners on favorite backroads, the more we like the 3000GT VR-4, though our fickle feelings fade again if the task is sedate highway cruising.

The key to the 3000GT VR-4's superb real-world performance is how it puts 300 horsepower from its twin-turbocharged 3.0-liter V-6 to the ground through its marvelous viscous-coupling all-wheel-drive system. When you exceed the limit with the others, their tails often will try to come around; it's called oversteer, and if you don't respond with the proper corrections, it's called a spin and, possibly, a wreck. However, the 3000GT VR-4 is as spin-resistant as a sports car can be made. Another all-wheel-drive advantage: The 3000GT posts the fastest 0-30-mph acceleration time in this test...and would undoubtedly win any rainy-day drag race. Changes for '93 include little beyond keyless remote entry and optional chrome wheels.

Our notebooks were full of praise of its prowess under fire: "A near-ideal backroad companion." "Unshakable stability." "There's no better supercar for the inexperienced driver." "The easiest-to-drive supercar in production." "Rolling proof that technology can compensate for many driver inadequacies."

Yet we had mixed opinions about its livability: "Too big, wide, and heavy." "Ergonomics are needlessly silly." "Head room is scarce and the seats are uncomfortable." "Steering is overboosted." "Braking distance is a bit long." "I can't believe how fast this car went up in price."

The 3000GT VR-4 is our recommendation if this is to be your first super-high performance car. If not, may we show you something in a rear-drive?

NISSAN 300ZX TURBO



We love the 300ZX Turbo even more on the highway than we do on the racetrack—and it's a goggle in power-on oversteer.

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e've said it about a million times since '89: We love the 300ZX Turbo, whether blasting around the racetrack or cruising the interstate. We still like the styling, the interior is efficient and comfortable, the power remains bountiful, and the handling is marvelous. It doesn't diminish our admiration that others

now reach 60 mph a half-tick faster, corner 0.1 g harder, or behave better while lapping the racetrack faster. Nissan must agree: It made no substantial changes for '93. Like the '69 Camaro Z-28, '73 BMW 2002 tii, and many others, it's the kind of car we'd love to see produced forever virtually as is.

"It's a timeless keeper," said one editor, "the kind you could live with for 10 years and be perfectly happy."

The 300ZX Turbo excels in everyday driving. The cockpit is spacious for a sports car, entry and exit are easy, seats are comfortable for long drives, gauges are logically positioned and controls easily reached. The Touring suspension setting is as comfortable as a sport sedan, while Sport is perfect for backroad charging. Only those who have their own private racetrack don't agree that its power and handling are more than adequate.

"The 300ZX is comfortable and capable." "This isn't a racer like the RX-7, but more a wonderfully elegant and comfortable tourer." "Until the Supra, it won the Best of Both Worlds contest. It's easygoing around town, but offers everything you need when you get the chance for a sporty romp."

At the dragstrip, this example was the quickest—by a half second to 60 mph—we've tested, despite some axle hop leaving the line. It reached an electronically limited 154-mph top speed and whipped through the slalom at an impressive 67.6 mph. We were less impressed on the road-race circuit, where it exhibited substantial power-on oversteer, unnerving but something that would rarely show up on the street (except perhaps to the incautious in the rain). Still, we found it easy to catch these slides, and one of our many hotdogs even maintained a tire-smoking opposite-lock drift all the way around the skidpad.

Though its twin turbos spool up quickly, some complained of boost lag. Others wished for better stopping power (stopping distance was below the average of this all-star field), better tires (swapping its Eagle ZRs for newer, maybe wider, Eagle GC-Ss might reduce power oversteer), more storage space, and maybe a cupholder. And we'd like ours without the mandatory T-top, please.

"A wonderfully balanced car, this is a shining accomplishment: a wonderful everyday GT," said one editor, summing up our collective opinion.



TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO



Imagine discovering your chubby grade-school sweetheart grew up to be Sharon Stone. That sums up our delighted surprise over the Supra's transformation



Forget everything you know about the previous Supra Turbo. Thanks to massive changes, the new Supra Turbo can sprint with a Corvette ZR-1 and dogfight with a Mazda RX-7, yet offers near-Lexus grace away from the playing field. Think of it as a Lexus SC 300 on steroids, or perhaps better, the 928 replacement for which Porsche longs.

Only its electronic top-speed limiter kept the Supra from winning all objective performance categories, including a blistering 4.9-second 0-60-mph run (the advantage of leading the league in horsepower). It was fastest around the road-racing circuit, and only the Mitsubishi 3000GT VR-4 was easier to drive at the limit (and the all-wheel-drive 3000GT wasn't going as quickly). This early production Supra Turbo was slightly quicker than the preproduction prototype we tested for the March issue.

Rather than compromise with either a small-diameter turbocharger to spin up faster to reduce lag or a power-producing-but-slow-responding large turbine, Toyota employed both in sequence. The result: The Supra enjoys a wealth of both top-end power and low-end torque. Its Torsen limited-slip differential and sticky Michelins help put that force directly to the ground with little drama. Four-channel ABS and giant front brake rotors, complete with spiral internal ventilating fins, help generate stopping power at least as impressive as its accelerative force.

When your right foot isn't glued to the floor, you'll appreciate that the Supra shares many chassis and suspension components with the SC 300 and has a Lexus-like array of creature comforts, which include everything from cruise control and tilt steering wheel to an anti-theft system and dual airbags to power windows and door locks. The Supra Turbo and 3000GT VR-4 alone in this segment are rated for four passengers, but it's best if the folks in back are toddlers.

"Terrific combination of ride and handling, especially for something so fast," said one editor. "Actually the non-turbo Supra (which acted as a photo stand-in for much of this comparison) is more than plenty fast enough and would make a fine daily driver." "Very easy to drive fast, with phenomenal ride quality." "The Supra captures most of the best and eliminates most of the worst of two cars I love: 300ZX and RX-7."

The styling provoked heated opinions—and ours didn't have the Superbird rear wing. The few other dislikes included lack of boost or oil-pressure gauges, vague shifter feel, and the paltry rear seat space. "This is a Supra? I love it!" exclaimed one of our editors—something you'll probably hear a lot in the next few months.

TOP SPEED (mph)

ACURA NSX	162
MAZDA RX-7	159
TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	159
NISSAN 300ZX TURBO	154
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4	150

SKIDPAD (lateral g)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	0.98
MAZDA RX-7	0.97
ACURA NSX	0.92
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4	0.88
NISSAN 300ZX TURBO	0.87

ACCELERATION, 0-60 mph (sec)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	4.9
NISSAN 300ZX TURBO	5.2
MAZDA RX-7	5.3
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4	5.3
ACURA NSX	5.6

SLALOM (mph)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	68.5
MAZDA RX-7	68.0
NISSAN 300ZX TURBO	67.6
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4	66.7
ACURA NSX	65.3

ACCELERATION, Quarter Mile (sec/mph)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	13.4/106.7
NISSAN 300ZX TURBO	13.8/103.9
ACURA NSX	13.9/100.9
MAZDA RX-7	13.9/99.7
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4	14.0/99.4

STOPPING DISTANCE, 60-0 mph (ft)

TOYOTA SUPRA TURBO	109
MAZDA RX-7	110
ACURA NSX	117
NISSAN 300ZX TURBO	125
MITSUBISHI 3000GT VR-4	130





TECH DATA

GENERAL					
	Acura NSX	Mazda RX-7	Mitsubishi 3000GT VR-4	Nissan 300ZX Turbo	Toyota Supra Turbo
Importer	Acura div., American Honda Motor Co., Inc. Torrance, Calif.	Mazda Motor of America, Inc., Irvine, Calif.	Mitsubishi Motor Sales of Amer., Inc., Cypress, Calif.	Nissan Motor Corp. in U.S.A., Gardena, Calif.	Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc., Torrance, Calif.
Location of final assembly plant	Tochigi, Japan	Hiroshima, Japan	Nagoya, Japan	Kanagawa, Japan	Motomachi, Japan
EPA size class	Two-seater	Two-seater	Sub-compact	Two-seater	Mini-compact
Body style	2-door, 2-pass.	2-door, 2-pass.	2-door, 4-pass.	2-door, 2-pass.	2-door, 4-pass.
Drivetrain layout	ME/RD	FE/RD	FE/AWD	FE/RD	FE/RD
Engine configuration	90° V-6, DOHC, 4 valves/cyl.	Twin rotary, turbocharged, intercooled	60° V-6, DOHC, 4 valves/cyl., turbocharged, intercooled	60° V-6, DOHC, 4 valves/cyl., turbocharged, intercooled	Inline 6, DOHC, 4 valves/cyl., turbocharged, intercooled
Engine displacement, ci/cc	182/2977	80/1308	181/2972	181/2960	183/2997
Horsepower, hp @ rpm, SAE net	270 @ 7100	255 @ 6500	300 @ 6000	300 @ 6400	320 @ 5600
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm, SAE net	210 @ 5300	217 @ 5000	307 @ 2500	283 @ 3600	315 @ 4000
Transmission	5-speed man.	5-speed man.	5-speed man.	5-speed man.	6-speed man.
Airbag	Dual	Driver side	Driver side	Driver side	Dual
Base price	\$68,600	\$32,500	\$37,250	\$37,090	\$37,000(est.)
Price as tested	\$69,330	\$33,925	\$38,951	\$38,585	\$37,000(est.)

DIMENSIONS					
Wheelbase, in./mm	99.6/2530	95.5/2425	97.2/2470	96.5/2450	100.4/2550
Track, f/r, in./mm	59.4/60.2/ 1510/1530	57.5/57.5/ 1460/1460	61.4/62.2/ 1560/1580	58.9/61.2/ 1495/1555	59.9/60.1/ 1520/1525
Length, in./mm	174.2/4425	168.5/4280	178.9/4545	169.5/4305	177.7/4515
Width, in./mm	71.3/1810	68.9/1750	72.4/1840	70.5/1790	71.3/1810
Height, in./mm	45.6/1157	48.4/1230	49.3/1253	48.4/1230	50.2/1275
Ground clearance, in./mm	4.6/117	4.5/115	4.4/112	4.5/114	5.1/130
Mfr's base curb weight, lb	3020	2800	3803	3474	3450
Weight distribution, f/r, %	42/58	50/50	58/42	55/45	53/47
Cargo capacity, cu ft	5.0	17.0	11.1	23.7	10.1
Fuel capacity, gal	18.5	20.0	19.8	19.0	18.5
Weight/power ratio, lb/hp	11.2	11.0	12.7	11.6	10.8

CHASSIS					
Suspension, f/r	Independent/independent	Independent/independent	Independent/independent	Independent/independent	Independent/independent
Steering	Rack and pinion	Rack and pinion, power assist	Rack and pinion, power assist, 4WS	Rack and pinion, power assist, super HICAS 4WS	Rack and pinion, power assist
Turning circle, ft	38.1	35.4	37.4	34.1	35.4
Brakes, f/r	Vented discs/vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/vented discs/ABS	Vented discs/vented discs/ABS
Wheel size, in.	15 x 6.5/16 x 8.0	16 x 8.0	17 x 8.5	16 x 7.5/16 x 8.5	17 x 8.0/17 x 9.5
Material	Cast aluminum	Cast aluminum	Cast aluminum	Cast aluminum	Cast aluminum
Tire size	205/50ZR15/ 225/50ZR16	225/50ZR16	245/45ZR17	225/50ZR16/ 245/45ZR16	235/45ZR17/ 255/40ZR17
Mfr. and model	Yokohama A-022 H1	Bridgestone Experia S07	Michelin XGT Z	Goodyear Eagle ZR	Michelin XGT Z