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AHEAD OF THE GAME

FOR NISSAN NUT, PAUL THOMPSON, MODIFYING IS ABOUT TAKING YOUR OWN PATH AND LEADING WHERE OTHERS FOLLOW, AND HIS SLICK SUPERCHARGED 350Z PROVES HE PRACTICES WHAT HE PREACHES

'I've never been one to keep up with the current trends or follow fashion,' states 38-year-old Paul Thompson when we meet him and his supercharged Nissan 350Z under the brutalist concrete columns of a Kilmarnock overpass. 'For me, modifying is about expressing yourself and creating something unique that reflects your own personality. Doing a modification because it's popular at the time is kind of missing the whole point.'

And it's been this ethos that has shaped his numerous modified builds over the years, from his humble beginnings of a wide-arch 1.0-litre Vauxhall Corsa painted in purple flip that he built in his garage, through to his latest muse: the candy-coloured creation you see on these pages.

'Aside from the initial blip of owning a Corsa at the start of my car owning career, everything else I've had has been Japanese,' says Paul. 'There's just something about cars from the Far East that really appeals to me. They're just so much more focussed and unapologetic than European cars and they take so well to whatever style of modifying or tuning you want to throw at them.'

His first step into Jap metal was a freshly imported Championship White Honda Integra DC5.

'The DC5 was an awesome car,' says Paul. 'Unfortunately, I blew the engine up by mis-shifting on a spirited drive. I can tell you, it's not a nice sound hearing parts of your engine smashing into the underside of your car…'

After his Honda adventure, Paul had his first experience of Nissan's brawny Z car when he bought a black 350Z GT.

'I had my first Zed for five years and in that time I really went to town on it,' Paul remembers. 'I did two totally different show builds with the car: one with an Amuse kit and pearl green paint and the other was wearing a ChargeSpeed kit coated in Renault Liquid Yellow.'

Feeling like he had completed his journey with the 350, Paul decided to part-out the Nissan and use the cash generated from its butchering to switch to a slice of Subaru-badged action.

'An Impreza hatch had caught my eye and I decided to take a punt on it from a local dealership. Unfortunately, it turned out the engine had been bodged together. I had it rebuilt with forged internals and fitted with a bigger turbo and it ended up around 450bhp. It was a weapon!'

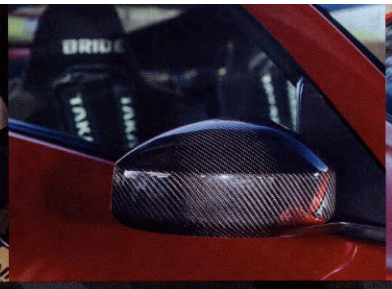
But even a scorching Scooby wasn't enough to hold Paul's attention for long, as he was soon coveting another naughty Nissan, only this time he was going up a division…

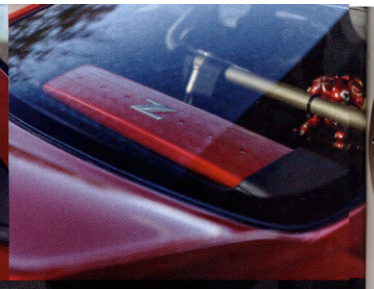
'I had some money saved up to renovate my house, but some quick 'man maths' made me realise that, combined with the proceeds of selling the Subaru, I'd have enough cash to buy a car I'd always wanted, but never thought I could afford, an R35 Nissan GT-R!'

With thoughts of those iconic circular tail lights burning bright in his brain, Paul wasted no time in securing an R35 of his own, however, it was clear after only a few months, that the initial purchase price of Nissan's supercar slayer is merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the cost of ownership.

'When it comes to performance, the GT-R is in a different league to all but the most exotic machines on the road,' Paul smiles. 'Unfortunately, this is also reflected in the running costs.'

After only three months of ownership, in which time he added a stage 1 map and made the pilgrimage to both the Nürburgring and Spa, the GT-R





had wracked up a further £2000 in costs – not including fuel.

'It was an incredible piece of kit, but simply too rich for my blood,' Paul laughs. 'I had to sell it on and finally start sorting out my house.'

But as the saying goes, "you can live in your car, but you can't race your house", and it was clear that, even with a large part of his finances now committed to bricks and mortar, he wouldn't be without a four-wheeled project for long.

'I saw another 350Z up for sale in a garage in Glasgow.' Paul recalls. 'It only had 49k on the clock and was up for £5k.'

The standard black paint was looking a little rough around the edges, but it was mechanically sound and as a seasoned veteran of 350Z modifying, Paul could see the potential.

'Originally, my plan was to simply fit some nicer wheels and a mild body kit and use it as a daily driver,' chuckles Paul. 'But there's an infliction in the Nissan community called 'Zeditus' and, unfortunately, I have it bad.'

This virulent infection affects many members of the 350Z-uk forum and leaves them with an unhealthy and uncontrollable obsession to continually improve their Z-cars.

'Before I knew it, I'd started a fresh build thread on the forum and members that remembered my previous builds from a few years ago were messaging me, expecting big things for the car,' laughs Paul. 'Well, I couldn't let then down could I?'

This desire to live up to expectations was simply too strong to resist and soon Paul was back down the rabbit hole that starts with opening your internet browser and ends with various car part-shaped boxes

'FOR THE BIGGEST GAINS YOU NEED TO HEAD DOWN THE FORCED INDUCTION ROUTE'

arriving at your door and your credit card smouldering under the strain.

'I was looking for some inspiration for the new build and kept seeing 350Zs wearing the Rocket Bunny wide arch kit pop up on my screen,' Paul remembers. 'And while it's definitely a wild kit, I feel that it's already a little played out, as often, once you've seen one Rocket Bunny-kitted car, you've kind of seen them all. So I made the decision to stay away from the bolt-on-arch-extensions-look, and work closer with the Zed's factory lines instead.'

Having always been a fan of the Amuse kits for the newer 370Z, Paul sourced a set of front and rear Amuse-style bumpers for the 350Z.

'Japanese tuning house Powerhouse Amuse only made a kit for the 370Z, so any 350Zs you see running Amuse bumpers are replicas, which have been made in the style of the genuine Amuse parts,' Paul explains. 'They're still great quality parts and fit well, they're just not genuine Amuse.'

Along with the new front and rear bumpers and Tarmac Sportz side skirts, Paul also sourced a rear wing from a Nissan GT-R that was custom fitted to the 350's tailgate.

'Seeing as the car needed a full strip down and respray, I decided to update it to as many of the later spec parts as I could,' Paul explains. 'That included swapping the headlights and taillights to LED items, and adding a later-spec bonnet with power bulge.'

Along with all the facelift parts and the kit, Paul dropped the Zed off at Simon's Accident Repair Centre in Irvine, for Simon to work his magic on the car's exterior transformation. After toying with the idea of going for a deep candy blue colour, he confirmed the car's latest hue as the sumptuous candy red that it now wears.

'I was in two minds on the colour, when I bought a set of Torqen big brake kits for both the front and rear which came in a cool anodised red finish and that sealed it,' Paul laughs. 'With eight-pot calipers gripping 356mm discs at the front and six-pot calipers and 330mm discs at the rear, they certainly stop you. In fact it's like hitting a brick wall!'

Now this might sound like overkill for the 287bhp produced by a stock 350Z, and you'd be right, but Paul's plans for the engine were only just beginning...

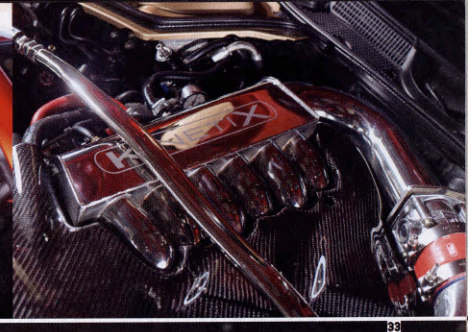
'The car was away at the bodyshop for around four months having the exterior parts fitted and painted, and in that time I couldn't resist looking at tuning parts for the VQ motor,' he grins.

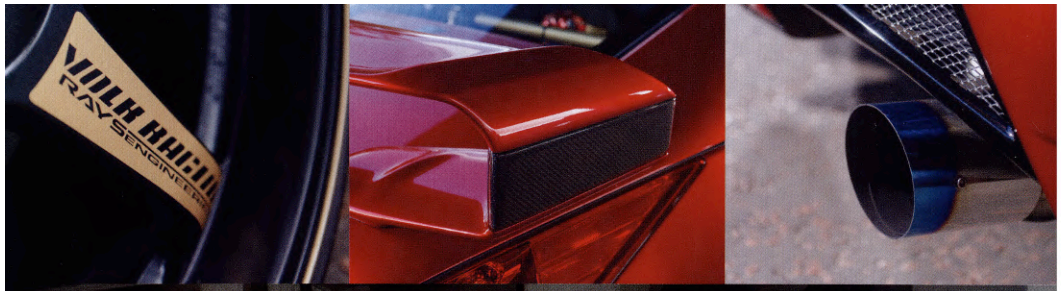
The Zed's 3.5-litre V6 engine responds well to naturally-aspirated tuning, but for big gains you really need to head down the forced induction route, and Paul had his heart set on a supercharger.

'Turbos give the most gains, but as most of the off the shelf kits come from the USA, and are designed for left-hand drive cars, they don't fit UK cars without a lot of complex and

HERE COMES THE BRIDE

GETTING A HOLD OF A SET OF GENUINE BRIDE SEATS ISN'T ALWAYS EASY AND IS OFTEN EXPENSIVE, SO WHEN PAUL SAW A MEMBER OF THE 350-UK FORUM WAS SELLING A CAR EQUIPPED WITH A SET, HE SNAPPED UP THE WHOLE CAR! 'THE PREVIOUS OWNER HAD BLOWN UP THE 500BHP ENGINE AND THE CAR WAS GOING CHEAP, SO I BOUGHT IT, STRIPPED OUT THE SEATS AND ANY OTHER PARTS I NEEDED AND PARTED-OUT THE REST,' HE SAYS. HAPPY DAYS!





expensive fabrication work.' Paul explains. 'Also, as the bay is so tight for space, they can have heat management issues, too, and suffer from low down lag, whereas the supercharger kits are easier to fit, run much cooler and the hit of power is much more linear and comes in lower in the rev range, too.'

Surfing the 'for sale' threads on the forums, Paul was lucky to stumble across an owner in the States who was selling a Vortech supercharger kit.

'I decided to snap up the kit as it was offered for a good price, but simply installing the kit alone wasn't going to cut it, so I began buying the additional tuning parts I'd need to make the most of the charger,' Paul says.

On its own the charger is good for around 350bhp, when other OEM parts begin limiting the power. To avoid this restriction and allow the charger to provide the maximum increase it could, Paul uprated the Nissan's fuelling system with a set of 900cc Bosch injectors and an AAM fuel return system. He also freed up the breathing with a Kinetix inlet manifold, a Treadstone intercooler with Mishimoto fans plus a full exhaust system in polished stainless steel with Titanium burnt tips and sports cats.

'When the Zed came out of the bodyshop, I was straight onto fitting the tuning parts before taking it up to Chris Forbes at Dynatune in East Kilbride to have the car mapped on the dyno with UpRev software,' Paul says. 'After a day on the rollers I drove away with a cool 500bhp under my right foot! The car was totally transformed!'

To help contain all this additional grunt, Paul also saw fit to install an Exedy twin-plate clutch and single mass flywheel, plus a set of 19in Volk TE37 wheels with Nankang NS2 Ultra Sport tyres.