

TRACKSIDE



by Diane Dale

“Daaaaatttsuuuuun”!

I can hear him now, our new friend Joe Riolo... bounding into the paddock to say hi between sessions at the SVRA Zippo Grand Prix at Watkins Glen on the weekend of September 10th.

Joe has a Datsun.

Joe has a beeeauuutiful Datsun.

Joe is a race car driver.

Joe is a faaaaaannntastic race car driver. And some how his passion for racing and Datsuns collided. This... is his story.

Growing up, Joe was always surrounded by cars; his dad owned a gas station. You don't spend that amount of time around cars and NOT fall in love with them. In 1989 Joe, a police officer by profession, took up drag-racing as a weekend hobby. He soon moved to stock car racing – street stock to late models – and eventually moved on to pro stocks – the NASCAR Busch North Series to be exact. Joe then carried on to modified touring and mingled with a year off from road racing before returning to purchase and race a Datsun Z car in 2001.

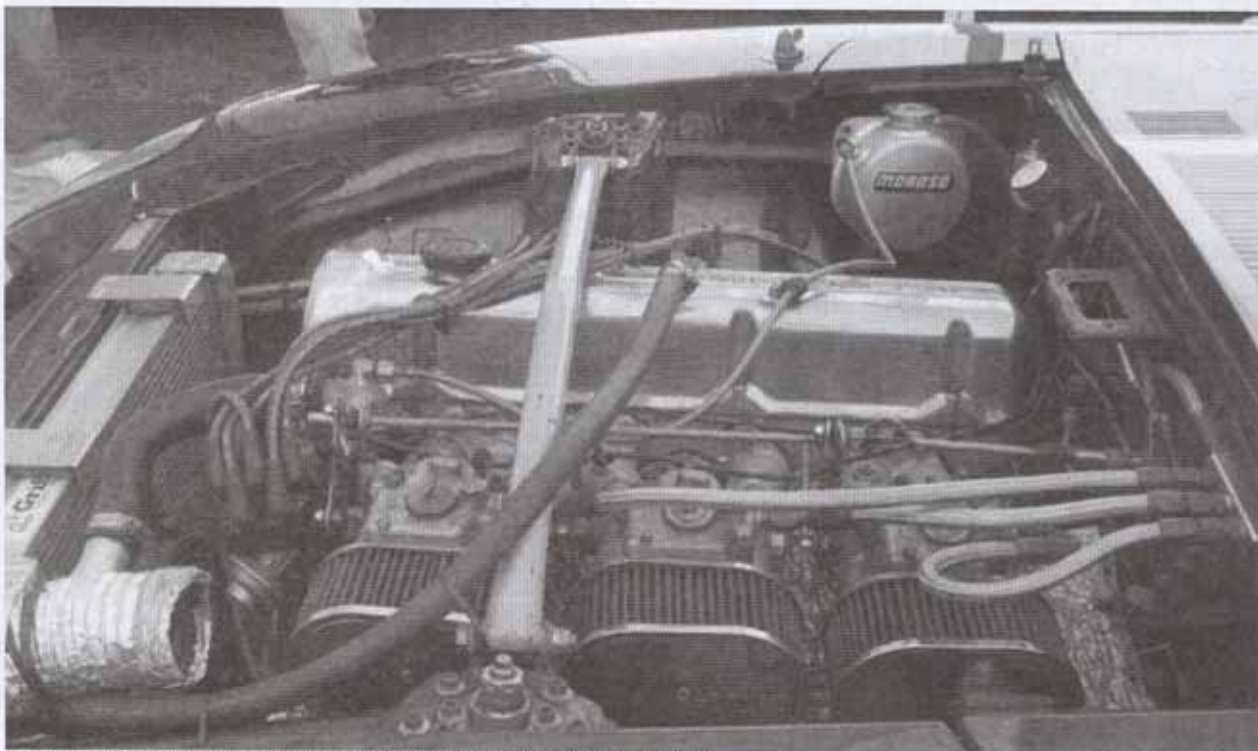
The 1972 Datsun 240z was purchased from David Bryson of Highpoint, North Carolina. Joe loved the 240z's because they were always a front runner in their time – this car could be fun, and with the right modifications – seriously competitive. \$5200 on eBay? The price was right. Joe had learned a lot from running in NASCAR – a place where the race is primarily won in the garage. Applying the basic setup and maintenance regimen to his Z car, Joe has been able to do extremely well with this car. 3 championships – North Atlantic for 2 years, New England Regional GT2 Championship in 2004, the leading car in New York State Road Racing and 2nd in points this year!

Joe's advice is simple. Be prepared. As any driving fan knows – it's essential to have the car set up right. By this



Looking into the eye of the storm – the smart styling of this 240z looks fantastic on the track

we mean camber, caster, toe-in. Shock settings, ride height, springs, sway bars, suspension geometry. Even the basics of tire tread, pressures, temperatures and track conditions play a huge part in having a good handling car. It's one thing to know all this theory – but another thing entirely to practice it and apply it to your car between every race event. Joe is meticulous with his notes, and they haven't failed him yet. Nobody was ever around to help him – so he learnt on his own how to turn feedback readings (taken with basic track-side measurements and a whole lot of gut feel) and turn them into useful input for his setup. Between every event, the car gets an overhaul



The strut bar, designed to tie the strut towers together to increase traction when turning

and everything is reset. Pushing your car to the limits at races can easily throw things out of whack, never mind that different tracks demand different settings – small things that some drivers aren't aware of or don't know how to accommodate. And with Joe's yearly schedule of almost 15 race events, that's a lot of work!

Of course driving skill counts as well – and Joe certainly isn't lacking in his ability there. One of his greatest memories of racing is competing in the 1999 Busch Grand National Winston Cup at Lowden New Hampshire. He was lined up on the grid – right up front with the greats of Ricky Craven and Teddy Christopher. You certainly don't get there without the right stuff. Looking across the start/finish line to the stands he could see his wife Brenda and their kids – really a moment in time when everything clicks and feels the best it can.

Joe knows that racing doesn't come easily and welcomes a huge amount of help and support from the best of them. Among his biggest supporters are his wife and 3 kids. David (7), Raquel (8) and Jonah (10) are often found torquing wheels, washing the windows and cheering Dad on. His crew Peter, Carlos and Josh are always close by and Vinny Bedini works on his engine (also the Bob Sharpe engines!). Various sponsors include Carland Autobody, Natural Pest Solutions (www.deersolutions.com – chemical free!), NC Aerospace Corp, Economy Signs and Fair Honda.

Joe's Datsun 240z runs in SCCA, HRG, HSR, SVRA and VRG. We look forward to seeing him on track again next year! He also runs a Chassis Setup and Race Preparation service out of Woodbury, CT. Joe can be reached at rioloracing@yahoo.com.



Joe Riolo and his 1972 Datsun 240z

Joe's 240z Stats

- β 1972 Datsun 240z (originally an SCCA-ITS car)
- β Richard Childress Racing Cage (rcrracing.com)
- β Lightened with fiberglass (1/4 fenders, hatch of Reaction Research's GTO body kit, www.ztrix.com) – hood and doors still steel
- β R200 Nissan Competition limited slip differential with the extra capacity rear cover
- β Stock 5-speed gear box and the Tilton 7" double disc clutch
- β Coilovers all around, Koni adjustable inserts (www.koni.com); 350lb springs in the front, 275lbs in the rear

β Disc Brakes - Wilwood Superlites in the front, Dynolites in the back (www.wilwood.com)

β 15x7 Panasports wheels with Goodyear 23x9 cantilever slicks (Goodyear F1 rain tires and sometimes plain old DOT GS-CS radials) (www.goodyear.com)

β MSD ignition and RCI fuel cell

β SuperTrapp 3" performance exhaust (www.supertrapp.com) and 6 into 1 Motorsport header (www.zcarparts.com)

β Racecar colours are the Subaru WRX racing blue and candy yellow over a silver base coat

- By Diane Dale -



Joe's 240z lines up for the "downtown parade" at the Zippo Grand Prix (note Rick Blaha's 240z and Diane Dale's 240z in the background)



Straight and simple – the basic interior holds a custom dash and essential gauges