

Daily Herald

AUTOFOCUS

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SECTION 9

AutoSunday

Contaminated
brake fluid leads
to costly repairs

Q. I went to our mechanic we knew for years for a simple brake job for my PT Cruiser on the front brakes and shaved the rotors. When I picked it up the brakes were a little soft and just assumed there might be air in the lines or just needed to adjust. I don't know anything about brakes and knowing I got new brakes, didn't really think about it.

Then a couple of weeks later, sitting at a red light, my car would start to creep so I'd have to apply more on the brakes to stop. We finally took it back in. The assistant was there and checked it out, took off the cap to the brake fluid and saw it was swollen. He said it seemed like something got mixed in there and contaminated it and we might need a master cylinder because of it. He advised us to leave it since it might be

too dangerous to drive and wait for the boss who had done our brakes. The boss checked it out, replaced the master cylinder, drained the lines and put in new fluid at no charge telling us he just doesn't understand why this happened. He said he uses the same brake fluid on all his cars.

A week later it started again, soft brakes, got so bad we took it there right away. After having it half the day, he told us to take it to the dealership. There was a leak in a seal he couldn't get to. We cautiously drove it there with very low brakes with the brake light on. The dealership looked at it and said there was something there that shouldn't be and it totally contaminated the whole brake system, everything was swollen. It would cost \$3,200 to fix.

We approached our mechanic with the itemized statement. He accused us of tampering or that someone was out to get us, still saying he uses the same brake fluid on all his cars and he did us a favor by replacing the master cylinder and not charging us. We asked if he wants to take care of the problem he created and save on the labor or take care of the dealership's bill himself. He denies he had anything to do with it and said it's out of his hands.

Anyone can make a mistake. Can you give me some insight on what happens when situations like this occur? There was nothing wrong with the car besides needing a simple brake job. Our mechanic also said there must have been something in the car before he did anything to make it react like that. What do we do?

A. I am sorry for the predicament you are in. This is a tough one. Based on the information you shared, there is no doubt that the brake fluid was contaminated. The \$3,200 question is when and where. If anything other than the brake fluid was put in the brake reservoir, it would cause the catastrophic damage to the hydraulic system that you described.

The details of your story point to the shop that did the brakes, but I want to ask a few questions to jog your memory.

Was this the only shop to work on your car? Do you ever have your oil changed at a quick lube? Typically they top off all the fluids. Could a mistake have happened before this other shop worked on the car? I don't know but if you can narrow it down to them without question, you might ask them to turn it in to their Garage Keepers Insurance. All reputable repair shops carry an insurance policy to cover them for errors and accidents. Perhaps your auto insurance company could help you with this.

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BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

Car enthusiasts who lusted for nearly 20 years after Nissan's Skyline GT-R sports car are going gaga over the new-generation GT-R that's arriving on U.S. soil.

"Incredible," read the headline in Car and Driver magazine. Road and Track said the GT-R bested well-known competitors Chevrolet Corvette Z06 and Porsche 911 Turbo in the magazine's comparison test.

It's not hype. The 2009 GT-R coupe is an exotic and intriguing machine whose 480-horsepower, twin-turbo V-6 delivers power with a sharp yet linear thrust and whose passengers hear the odd clunks

At a glance

Price as tested: \$75,900
Engine: 3.8-liter, double overhead cam, twin-turbo V-6
City/highway fuel consumption: 16/21 miles per gallon
Length: 183.3 inches
Wheelbase: 109.5 inches
Curb weight: 3,836 pounds
Built: Japan
Destination charge: \$1,000

of a sophisticated, sequential, dual-clutch automatic transmission as they travel.

The race-car-like suspension, all-wheel drive and novel positioning of the GT-R transmission behind the seats

— put there to help balance weight front to back — create a car that handles like it's really on rails.

And the interior, with G-force graphs, hug-me leather seats and navigation with voice recognition, makes the GT-R seem like a road-worthy spaceship, not a car — and that's before a driver tries the GT-R's Launch Control.

No wonder automotive buffs are excited.

To be sure, there are drawbacks.

With a starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, of \$70,850 for a base coupe, the GT-R is the highest-priced production Nissan ever offered in the United States. (Skyline GT-Rs were sold in Japan but

CAMARO



Performance car for the '80s

BY JEFF MELNYCHUK
Wheelbase Communications

The calling card of the 1980s was techno music, big hair and tinsel-covered clothing. At the time we thought all was great, including the cars we drove.

Looking back at the old photos, it's hard to believe how we looked. It's even harder to believe that performance cars survived.

Although not particularly glorious, beautiful or fast, the 1982-'92 Camaro did its part to connect us with our performance past so that we could have the luxury of choosing from the plethora of performance vehicles of all shapes and sizes that exists today.

Without the Camaro and Mustang to pull us through until the 1990s came along, who knows where we might be today.

Coming off the back end of the 1970s, a decade of ever-tightening emissions and safety regulations and increasing insurance rates, "performance" was more of slogan than a fact of life. Chrysler was coming back from the financial brink and leaded gas was on the way out.

The fun times appeared to be almost over, at least if you were in the market for a new muscle car.

However, there was a bright spot: the third-generation Camaro that reached the streets in January of 1982 seemed to promise a return to the kind of serious high-performance thrills that had made it so popular a decade earlier.

It was a showstopper, to be sure. With seductive styling, a wider and lower stance and rakish all-glass rear hatch, the new Camaro

Fine Lines

Camaro, 1982-1992

not only appeared fast, but made the Ford Mustang, its arch-nemesis since the late 1960s, look like a stubby econobox.

But with manufacturers' ears still ringing from the 1970s gas crisis, the focus was on economical front-wheel-drive vehicles.

Meanwhile, with a base 90-horsepower four-cylinder engine under the hood, looks were all the Camaro had. And the best you could get was a 165-horsepower, 305 cubic-inch (5.0-liter) V8.

With easily double the power from the same displacement today, looking back it seems almost silly. However, just like the big hair, the anemic V8 seemed like a good idea at the time. Moreover, and hair notwithstanding, the technology just wasn't there to mass produce fuel-efficient and emissions-friendly performance cars.

Gradually, however, the competitive juices that flowed between GM and Ford for street and track supremacy would spark the development of ever increasing strength under the hood of the Camaro and its closely related Firebird cousin. They eventually began living up to their go-fast images, despite all the government and environmental hurdles thrown in their path.

The powertrain availability was a far cry from the original 1967-'69 first-generation, as well as early 1970-'72 second-generation models that were not impacted by increasing emissions standards and skyrocketing insurance



WHEELBASE COMMUNICATIONS PHOTOS
After a 15-year performance decline, the turning point for the Camaro came in 1985 with the arrival of the more powerful IROC-Z.

premiums for performance cars.

Despite that fact, the third-generation Camaro was actually a competent, well-balanced machine that hugged the road and at least sounded strong at higher revs. The Z28 in particular, with its beefier suspension, body skirts and wider rubber mounted onto five-spoke alloy wheels, was the choice of many buyers. Although not blindingly fast, it was fun to drive.

Over in the Mustang camp, Ford recognized the direct threat the Camaro posed to its Pony-car supremacy. Competition grew fierce and the winners were performance-hungry buyers who rejoiced in 1985 with the arrival of the hot new Camaro IROC-Z (an abbreviation for the International Race of Champions). It would be the Camaro's unofficial turning point.

The IROC pitted top drivers from different racing disciplines, head to head, in identically prepared cars. Camaro became IROC's car supplier in 1985, and,

as a result, Chevrolet prepared a mild street-going model with a fuel-injected 215-horse 5.0-liter V8. Two years later, IROC-Z was available with the 5.7-liter (350 cubic-inch) V8 making 225 horsepower, a value that would eventually climb to 245 over the next few seasons. Along with the more potent V8, Chevrolet trotted out the Camaro Convertible, finally matching the Mustang in the fun-in-the-sun department.

By the close of the 1980s, the once-sensational-looking Camaro was beginning to appear dated. Rounded, edgeless sheet metal was in vogue and sales were beginning to soften. Other problems, including a rough ride (especially Z28s and IROC-Zs), annoying squeaks and rattles plus leaks around the seams of the optional glass T-roof were inherent in all third-generation Camaros as well as their Firebird cousins, right from the beginning.

In 1992, after 10 years on the market and the 25th anniversary of the brand, the Canadian production plant ended its run of the most successful — in terms of sales — series of Camaros in the history of the brand. A fourth-generation model arrived early in 1993 to carry the torch for another nine years before bowing out. After an eight-year drought with no Camaro, a new version will prepare to once again do battle with the Mustang in early 2009.

Although dated in appearance and generally unappreciated today, in no small way the 1980s Camaro was one of the cars responsible for getting us through a decade-long performance drought.



The popularity of the third-generation Camaro is easy to understand when you consider the model diversity and the fact that its only real competitor was the Mustang. The Camaro will be back in early 2009.

Most expensive Nissan finally makes it to U.S. shores

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ASSOCIATED PRESS/Courtesy of Nissan
The Nissan GT-R has been popular ride in video games for several years.

never officially in the U.S.)

But some dealers already are telling prospective customers that demand for the 2,400 GT-Rs coming to the

States each year is so great, they need to pay as much as \$30,000 over the window sticker price. And only some 700 select Nissan dealers can

sell and service the GT-R.

The fuel economy rating for this two-door car is just 16 miles per gallon in city driving and 21 mpg on the highway, or about par with that of a Toyota 4Runner sport utility vehicle.

Competitors include such long-running sports cars as the V-8-powered Chevrolet Corvette Z06 with 505 horsepower and a price of \$73,255 and the \$127,060 Porsche 911 Turbo with 480-horsepower turbocharged V-6.

Americans, who watched the previous four generations of Skyline GT-Rs from afar — and in video games where the GT-R became a popular video car — get the fifth-generation model, which is sold without the word Skyline in the name.