

The 280ZX adopted suspension similar to that of the concurrent [Bluebird 910](#), with [MacPherson struts](#) in front and [semi-trailing arm independent suspension](#) in the rear. The wheelbase was up from its predecessor (90.7 in or 2,304 mm) to 91.3 in (2,319 mm) for the two-seater.

The 280ZX's body was redesigned with aerodynamics in mind. By closing in the open grille of the first generation [Z-car](#) and through other improvements taken from wind-tunnel testing, the [drag coefficient](#) was reduced from 0.467 to 0.385, and the [lift coefficient](#) from 0.41 to 0.14. The new design had a lower center-of-gravity and nearly 50/50 weight distribution in both the two-seater and 2+2 designs. The rear of the car was stretched to accommodate a larger 80 L (21.133 US liquid gallons) fuel tank. Overall, the new body design gave better fuel economy and high-speed stability (one of the known issues from the first generation Z-car).

The 280ZX initially offered either unassisted rack-and-pinion steering or a [Datsun 810](#)-derived recirculating-ball with power assistance. Neither came in for much appreciation in period road tests.^[3] A new power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering replaced the recirculating-ball steering system for the 1981 turbo, becoming available on the naturally aspirated models the following year.

It is a common misconception that the 280ZX's [L28](#) engine is less powerful than the [L24](#) engine of the 1970 [240Z](#) or the [L26](#) engine of the [260Z](#); the difference is due to [Nissan](#) adopting the [SAE](#) net standard of power measurement, which resulted in lower power ratings than the earlier gross figures and added emissions. However, [Nissan](#) designers deliberately sacrificed raw acceleration for improved fuel economy in the 280ZX, so the early 1979 models rated at 135 hp (101 kW) actually had slower acceleration than the [240Z](#), largely due to increases in weight and taller gearing, as well as power losses to emissions controls. This overall performance deficit was not addressed until the release of the 280ZX Turbo in 1981.

The 280ZX was branded in the North American and Australian markets as the "[Datsun 280ZX](#)"; and in the local Japanese market as the "Fairlady Z". For the 1979 model year, in the American market, it was co-branded "[Datsun](#) by [Nissan](#)" through the 1983 model year. These were considered transitional years, as [Nissan](#) began to phase in their new global brand under the [Nissan](#) name.

The Japanese market got both 2.0 L and 2.8 L engines. The 2.0 [L-engine](#)d Fairlady 200Z used the [L20](#) engine common in [Nissan](#) family cars of the same era. The smaller engine was offered so that it would comply with Japanese government [dimension regulations](#), while models with the larger engine were regarded as the top-level luxury model in Japan. Export markets all got the [L28](#)-powered version. In Japan the Fairlady was joined by a [Nissan Skyline](#)-derived sedan and coupé, called the [Nissan Leopard](#) TR-X, available at Nissan Japanese dealerships called "[Nissan Bluebird Stores](#)".

Two trim levels were offered in North America, with a no-frills two-seater and a fully equipped 2+2 GL. The GL package was also available for the two-seater, carrying the full equipment list.^[4] Leather seats were optional, and an optional digital instrument cluster was introduced in 1982. The T-bar roof was available on both bodystyles, but only in combination with the GL package. A "Blackout" package, without most of the chrome brightwork, was available for the standard two-seater.