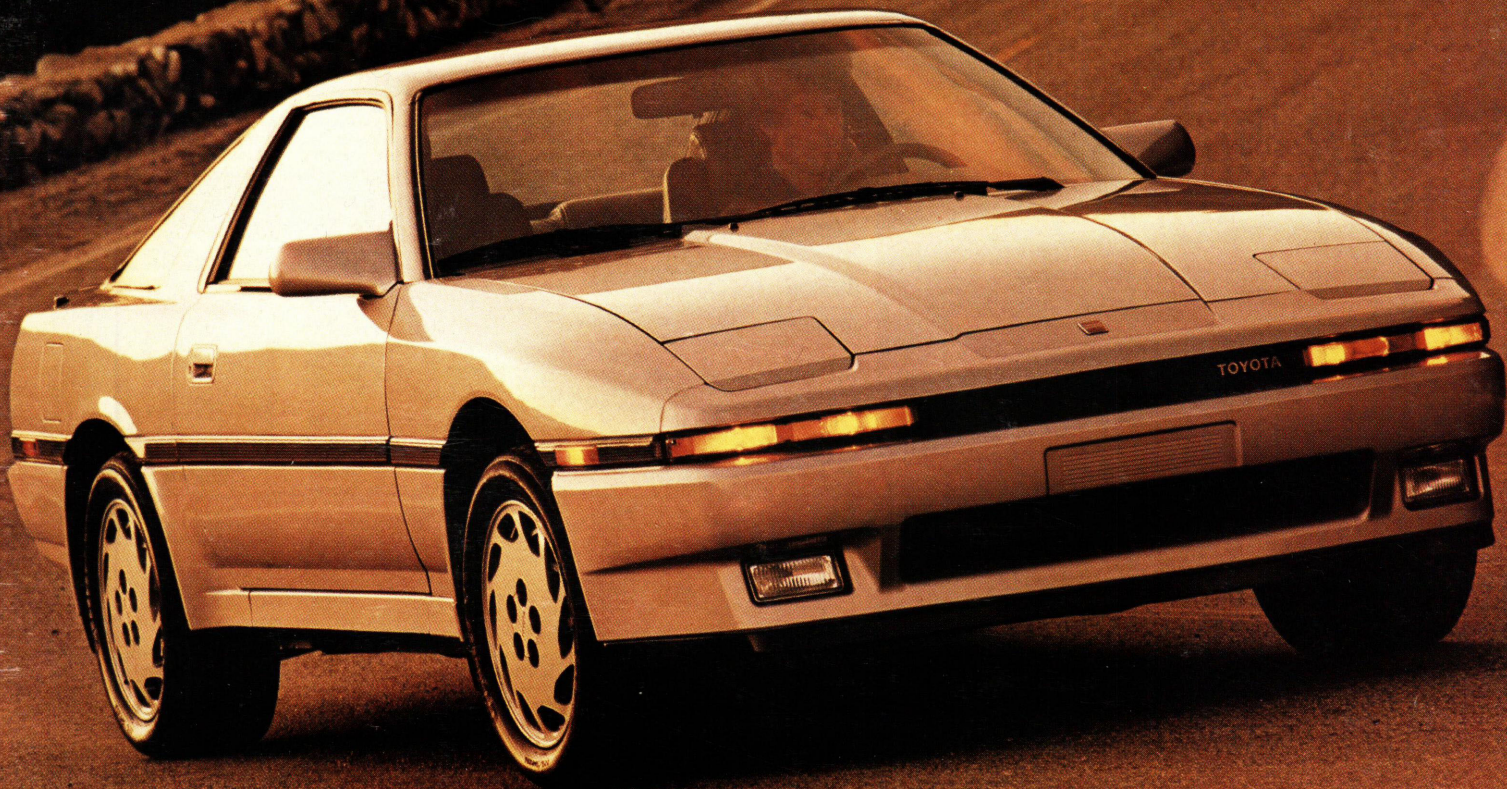


# AutoWeek

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**New Toyota Supra**  
*The Japanese sports car  
comes of age*



# Coming of Age

*Maturity, in the shape of Toyota's new Supra, has finally come to the Japanese sports car*

*By David Barry*

**T**he Japanese sports car has grown up. And Toyota's new Supra demonstrates its coming of age. Three generations after the Datsun 240Z and the Mazda RX-7 filled the marketing gap left by Triumph, MG and Austin-Healey, the Japanese Big Four are heavily into the sports car business. Mazda has an RX-7 Turbo coming to rival the Porsche 944 Turbo, Nissan promises the four-cam, mid-engine Mid4 as a 1987 or later challenge to Ferrari, and Honda is rumored to have a mid-engined V6 two-seater coming under the Acura badge. The new Supra, arriving hot on the heels of the very successful MR2, puts Toyota ahead, at least for the moment, of the Japanese pack in the push for worldwide sports car superiority.

Our first official glimpse of the '86 Supra came at the Hammamatsu racetrack, about four hours north of Tokyo. Toyota had a very specific point to make at Hammamatsu. Before the journalists were allowed on the track in the assembled fleet of new Supras, a factory driver did a number of laps in a Toyota Group C race car, passing us at about 190mph. It was a way of saying that Toyota is serious about becoming a fast car company.

The new Supra is a fast car, too. With 200bhp under the hood, the Supra claims a 0-60mph time of 7.8sec and a top speed of 130mph. On the straight at Hammamatsu where the factory racer touched 190, the Supra would do over 120 with enough revs and power left to make 130 a realistic target on a longer straight.

If borne out in practice, the Supra's acceleration potential puts it right up against the Camaro IROC Z28 and Porsche 944. But more importantly, the Toyota is a big step ahead of both Chevrolet and Porsche in ride comfort, without a great sacrifice in cornering potential. While both the Camaro and 944 shine at speed and high g force handling, the harsh compliance of their suspen-

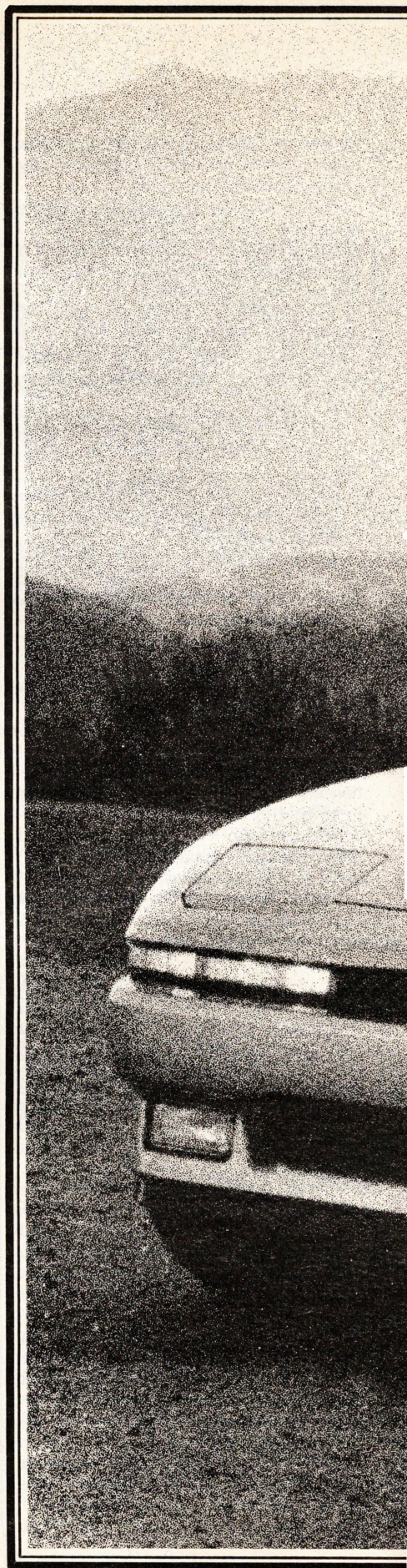
sions can punish driver and passenger at legal speeds, which is what most cars, sports cars included, spend most of their lives doing. The Supra, like the Mazda 626, RX-7 and Nissan Maxima SE, offers cockpit adjustable suspension control which allows the driver to tune the ride to his or her driving. The Supra's cockpit ride control system has two operating modes, normal and sport, with three different damping settings—soft, medium and hard—in normal, and two in the sport mode.

The Supra has a very substantial footprint with Goodyear Eagle 225/50VR tires, which accounts in part for its excellent handling. The one obvious shortfall in a car with the Supra's specs is anti-lock braking. Toyota says it's working on it and the Supra will get it as soon as it's ready. Our estimate is that it's a year away.

The Supra's all-new body shell, no longer shared with the down-market Celica, looks enough like the new RX-7 to qualify as a non-identical twin brother. That's not a bad thing, considering that both cars are clean, handsome shapes, but it's ironic and perhaps disappointing that two major—and very separate—styling groups could produce such similar cars.

Styling was only one part of the package sought by Toyota in designing the new Supra. With 42percent of the Japanese domestic market already locked up with its extremely diversified product line-up, Toyota aimed for increased foreign sales in the performance car market, an area in which the Japanese firm has not been strong in the past. Performance came fast: First the double overhead cam, 16valve mid-engined MR2, then the dohc front-wheel-drive Celica GT-S, which roughly matches the acceleration and top speed of the old Supra. Then the all-new Supra, with performance which puts its predecessors in the shade.

The Supra is not as fast as other 200bhp

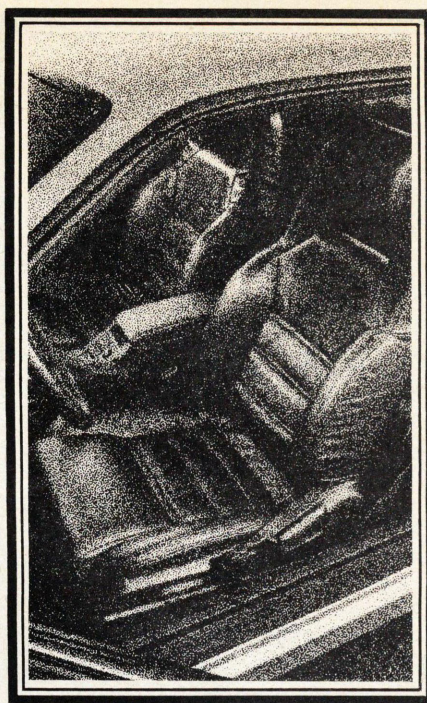
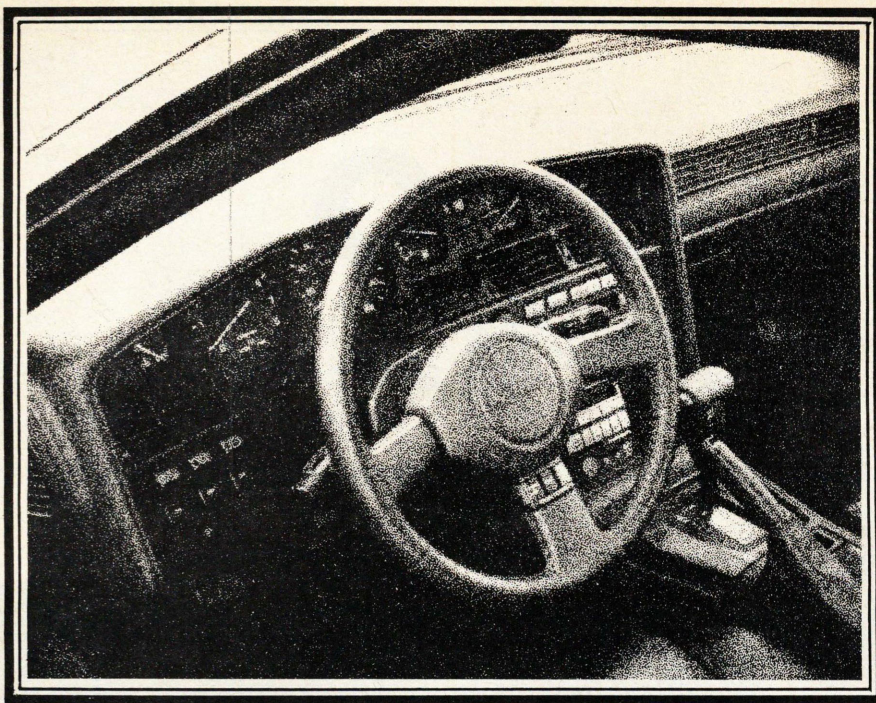






Vic Huber photos





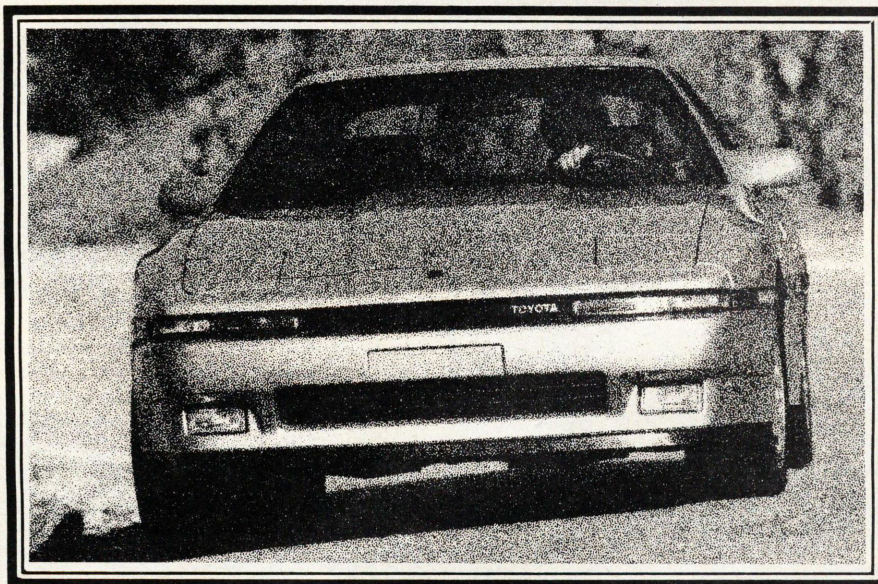
#### *Supra eschews digital dementia for analog gauges*

cars because it is heavy for its size. Very heavy. At 3450lb, the Supra is 600lb heavier than the 944, 700lb heavier than the RX-7 and dead even with the Camaro Z28. The weight pays off in meeting the design goals of the car, which placed a high premium on both roadholding and ride comfort. The Supra is quiet and comfortable in most driving modes, and while it may lack the agile feeling of an RX-7, the sense of quality and depth of engineering is tangible.

If the Supra were a few hundred pounds lighter, it would be a rocket. Probably it would also be noisier and less comfortable. It might be more fun for the die-hard enthusiast driver, but there is plenty of performance to play with as it is. The typical Supra buyer is seen by Toyota as a 35-year-old male with plenty of disposable income. In the past, GT cars aimed at that buyers' group have sold image at the expense of performance and ride comfort at the expense of roadholding. The Supra is a very welcome combination of image, comfort, performance and roadholding which is going to heighten the pressure on the competition to come up with better cars.

The excellence of the Supra's roadholding is an example of sound corporate thinking in a world where, all too often, corporate bean counters sandbag a new sports car by decreeing that it share engine, transmission, drivetrain and suspension components with the economy sedan. Good sports cars rarely evolve from economy car components. The ones that do tend to spend generations in the evolutionary process. Toyota, like Chevrolet with the new Corvette, and Porsche with the 928, decided that the Supra would get its own suspension and drivetrain components independent of any other car in the line-up. The design engineers were given a free hand, which in corporate auto building is probably like being paid to play hookey.

The Supra has a near 50/50 weight distri-



bution, a roomy cockpit and a plush interior, with big, round analog gauges and flush vinyl trim which does not look like vinyl. No video games on the dash, no gimmicks or styling excess; just the right degree of luxury to make the 35-year-old of means glow with pride of ownership. Climb inside and your first impression is one of class: a handsome well-laid-out interior with a broad, well-padded cowl and eminently legible analog gauges. The killer stereo, of course, is here. So are the infinitely adjustable seats with form-fit side bolsters and inflatable bladders for lumbar support.

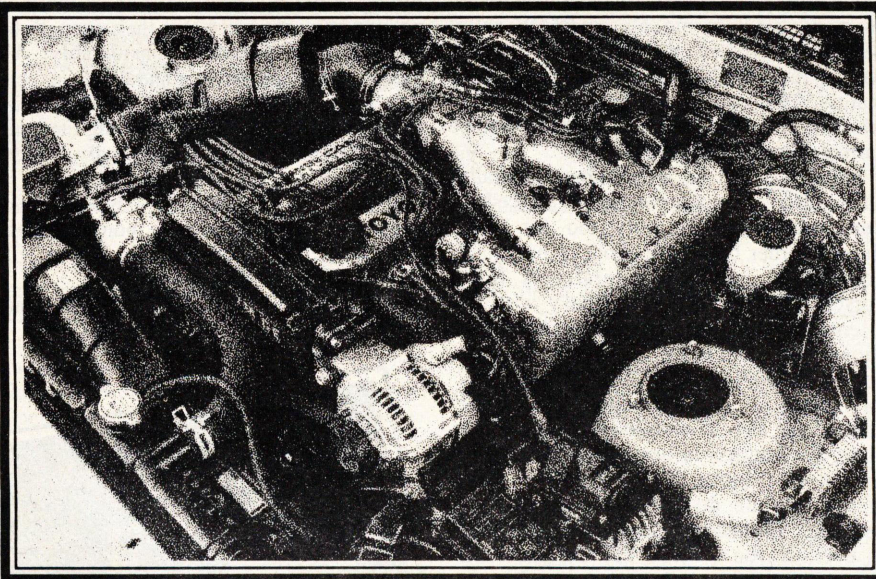
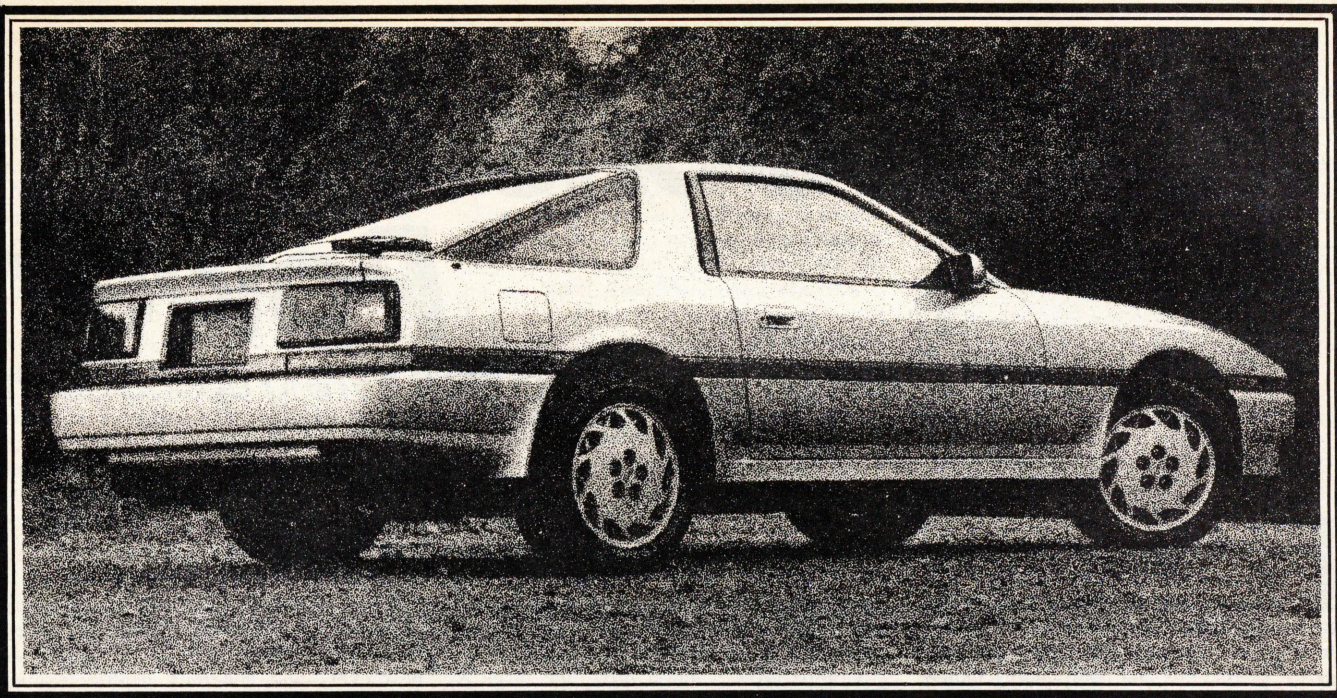
Toyota pioneered these "ultimate environment" seats in the Celica Supra, which didn't quite deserve them. In the new Supra, they are an integrated part of an adult sports car package, which is something we have not been accustomed to getting from Japan. Partly this is because the definition of a sports car is as subjective as sex appeal. No

combination of low 0-60mph times, high skidpad numbers, horsepower, valves by the dozen or multiple camshafts can make a car a sports car unless the result has the right emotional appeal. With its looks, driveability and superior feel the Supra has no trouble qualifying.

Considering that many Supras, like many Porsches, will be driven most of their lives at 55mph or less, the car is an eminently pleasant car to live with at legal speeds. In banzai mode, the Supra does anything you ask it short of smoking the tires, which it will only do through driver error. At the US press intro in Arizona, Dan Gurney was on hand to drive demonstration laps around Firebird Raceway. Granted, Gurney was working for Toyota at the time, but he's justifiably noted for his candor.

Asked for his off-the-record, c'mon-you-can-tell-us opinion of the Supra, Gurney said simply: He'd own one.





## Specifications

Base Price: ..... \$18,000 (est)  
 Wheelbase, (in): ..... 102.2  
 Length/Width (in): ..... 181.9/68.7  
 Curb weight (lb): ..... 3450  
 Powertrain: Front-mounted 183cu in/  
 3.0liter dohc, 24valve in-line six, iron block  
 and aluminum head, 200bhp  
 @ 6000rpm, 185lb ft @4800rpm, rear-  
 drive five-speed manual  
 0-60 (sec): ..... 7.8  
 Top speed: ..... 130mph (est)  
 Suspension: Ind front with double wish-  
 bones, coils and anti-roll bar; ind rear  
 with double wishbones, coils and anti-  
 roll bar  
 Brakes: ..... Vented front, rear discs  
 Tires: ..... 225/50VR16

*With 200hp, Supra's six is good for about 130mph*

"This car goes wherever you put it. If it doesn't, it's your mistake. Not the car's."

There is considerable depth of engineering behind the razor-sharp handling of the Supra. In front there is a cast aluminum upper A-arm and anti-roll bar, and tread is increased by 20mm. Rear track is also increased by 48mm and the double wishbone suspension is intended to minimize camber changes during bound and rebound. This is an area where price usually separate the mid and lower-priced sectors of the performance car market from the upper. It's where the Mazda RX-7 fell short, where the 300ZX still does, where the pre-1985 Corvette stumbled. The new Supra challenges cars well above its estimated \$18,000 price.

At extra cost the Supra is available with a removable roof. The car looks stunning without its roof, but looks aren't everything. Road test driving of the roofless Supra

showed up a horrible case of chassis flex that totally discouraged spirited driving. Toyota design engineers admit that chassis rigidity suffers greatly when the top is removed, and claim there is no remedy for the problem.

Be that as it may, the handling competence of the fixed-top Supra is such that it raises the question of whether it could take more power still. If it can swallow 200bhp so well, it stands to reason that it could handle more, and Toyota has considerable experience at both turbocharging and supercharging its four valves/cylinder engines.

A 250bhp Supra, which is a plausible estimate of a turbocharged or supercharged version, would run head-to-head with the Corvette, Porsche Carrera, 944 Turbo and Ferrari 328, which seems to be the direction the Japanese are taking. The Nissan Mid4 is clearly aimed at Ferrari and Porsche, and the upcoming mid-engined Honda sports car will probably go the same direction. A turbocharged Supra would be a breakthrough, or breakout, for the Japanese sports car in the same way that the Honda 750cc four-cylinder motorcycle was in the early 1970s. Until they moved into the heavyweight realm, Japanese motorcycles were notable for doing more with less, providing performance at a bargain. Once the large-displacement barrier was breached, Japanese motorcycle makers created a new breed—the Superbike—which left other motorcycle makers in the shade and put most of them out of business.

Even in conventionally aspirated form, the Supra is, for the first time, a Japanese sports car which stands on its own performance and styling merits regardless of price. It is a car not to be enjoyed because it is such a bargain, the way the Datsun 240Z and the early RX-7s were, but a car to be enjoyed because it is so good.

All of which makes us wonder just how far away we are from seeing the first true Japanese supercar. **AW**