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This article with its photo was published by the Times on July 19 in the year 2000. It was resurrected 12 years later when my good friend Yutaka Katayama, known as "Mr. K" in automotive circles, reached age 103 in Tokyo. Mr. K is the father of the Nissan Datsuns and Z-cars. Publication of the article brought us together. It started our close and long-lasting friendship. Organizers of Mr. K's birthday party wanted the article for display at a Tokyo banquet hall. — Jackson Sellers



Workhorse Datsun: He Changed the Oil, Not the Car

By JACKSON SELLERS
Times Staff Writer

It's an old joke. An American asks a British gardener how to create a lush lawn like those at English castles. "First get yourself some good grass," replies the gardener with a twinkle in his eye. "Then roll it for 300 years."

I think of that wry gardener whenever someone asks how I've kept my 28-year-old car purring for 323,000 miles. It's really quite simple. First get yourself a good car, then change the oil every 3,000 miles forever. And that's no joke.

My 1972 Datsun PL510 wagon was purchased new in Laguna Beach to replace a dead 10-year-old Buick Riviera. She has never been out of California. And except for a trip to Yosemite in her early years, she has always cruised the freeways and byways of Southern California. Mostly she carries me to my Costa Mesa office, but often to headquarters in Los Angeles. On average, she totes me 11,500 miles a year.

As you can see, I think of my car as a female. After all, she has only four cylinders, just half the number in the macho Buick she succeeded. It's the difference

between a mare and a stallion. Not much really, because either can carry you anywhere.

Southern California's dry environment contributed mightily to my car's rust-free longevity. She has never endured the corrosiveness of salty Snowbelt roads. And a goodly amount of waxing and polishing throughout her life has helped too.

Nowadays my Datsun seldom goes anywhere for pleasure. She is strictly a workhorse, not a pet at all, although I do pat and stroke her dashboard with some frequency just to let her know I care. If my wife and I have weekend pleasure driving in mind, we take the "other" car, currently a 1996 Acura 2.5TL with air conditioning and other creature comforts. The unadorned Datsun stands in the garage and waits for her master to go to work again.

In the summer of 1983, after I had driven the Datsun more than a decade, I was reassured I had "good grass." In an article devoted to the 1968-73 Datsun 510s, *Road & Track* magazine called the series a "Used Car Classic," and shouted the slogan "Poor Man's BMW" in large type. A chart listed prices for these used cars, all of

which had at least 100,000 miles on odometers that counted to only 99,999.

According to the magazine, my near-perfect filly, a 1972 station wagon manufactured in November 1971, would bring at least \$3,000 in 1983, or \$300 more than I had paid for her. This was back when a buck was really a buck. Leaving behind Greed, I drove away with Pride.

And I rode the Datsun for 17 more years. I am riding her still. I get thumbs-ups on the freeway and compliments at stop signals. It seems that everybody, even the mechanics who repair her, want to buy her. Ubiquitous members of Southland 510 clubs almost salivate. A one-owner wagon with the original engine!

Japan's venerable Nissan Motor Co. began manufacturing the Datsun 510 in the late 1960s, and immediately entered it in a series of stock car races. From the beginning, this car obviously had more to offer than clean styling. Under the hood sat an engine with power to spare, just waiting to do a job worthy of it. The little 510 became a giant killer. By 1972 it had a solid lock on the 2.5-liter Trans-America championship.