

Motorsport

Racing versions of the first-generation RX-7 were entered at the prestigious 24 hours of Le Mans endurance race. The first outing for the car, equipped with a 13B engine, failed by less than one second to qualify in 1979. The next year, a 12A-engine car not only qualified, it placed 21st overall. That same car did not finish in 1981, along with two more 13B cars. Those two cars were back for 1982, with one 14th place finish and another DNF. The RX-7 Le Mans effort was replaced by the 717C prototype for 1983. In 1991, Mazda became the first Japanese manufacturer to win the 24 hours of Le Mans. The car was a 4-rotor prototype class car, the 787B. The FIA outlawed rotary engines shortly after this win. To this day the rotary powered Mazda is the only Japanese manufacturer to have ever won the prestigious 24 hour Le Mans race outright.

Mazda began racing RX-7s in the IMSA GTU series in 1979. That first year, RX-7s placed first and second at the 24 Hours of Daytona, and claimed the GTU series championship. The car continued winning, claiming the GTU championship seven years in a row. The RX-7 took the GTO championship ten years in a row from 1982. The RX-7 has won more IMSA races than any other car model. In the USA SCCA competition RX7s were raced with great success by Don Kearney in the NE Division and John Finger in the SE Division. Pettit Racing won the GT2 Road Racing Championship in 1998. The car was a 93 Mazda RX7 street car with only bolt-on accessories. At season end Pettit had 140 points - 63 points more than the 2nd place team. This same car finished the Daytona Rolex 24-hour race 4 times.

The RX-7 also fared well at the Spa 24 Hours race. Three Savanna/RX-7s were entered in 1981 by Tom Walkinshaw Racing. After hours of battling with several BMW 530i and Ford Capri, the RX-7 driven by Pierre Dieudonné and Tom Walkinshaw won the event. Mazda had turned the tables on BMW, who had beaten Mazda's Familia Rotary to the podium eleven years earlier at the same event. TWR's prepared RX-7s also won the British Touring Car Championship in 1980 and 1981, driven by Win Percy.

Canadian/Australian touring car driver Allan Moffat was instrumental in bringing Mazda into the Australian touring car scene. Over a four year span beginning in 1981, Moffat took the Mazda RX-7 to victory in the 1983 Australian Touring Car Championship, as well as a trio of Bathurst 1000 podiums, in 1981 (3rd with Derek Bell), 1983 (second with Yoshimi Katayama) and 1984 (third with former motorcycle champion Gregg Hansford). Australia's adoption of international Group A regulations, combined with Mazda's reluctance to homologate a Group A RX-7, ended Mazda's active participation in the touring car series at the end of the 1984 season.

The RX-7 even made an appearance in the World Rally Championship. The car finished 11th on its debut at the RAC Rally in Wales in 1981. Group B received much of the

focus for the first part of the 1980s, but Mazda did manage to place third at the 1985 Acropolis Rally, and the Familia 4WD claimed the victory at Swedish Rally in both 1987 and 1989.

The RX-7 is considered as a popular choice in import drag racing, during the late nineties toward 2004 Abel Ibarra raced a space frame FD which averaged no less than high 6 seconds passes, until he replaced it with a space frame RX-8, the FD was later to shipped and sold to an Australian.

The FD RX-7 comprehensively and unarguably thrashed all other major manufacturers including Porsche 4 times in the Eastern Creek and Bathurst 12 Hour Endurance races in the mid to late 1990s.

The FC and FD are considered popular choices for drifting contests, given their short wheelbase and an average of 450 bhp (336 kW). Youichi Imamura won the D1 Grand Prix title in 2003 and Masao Suenaga almost won his in 2005, both in FDs.

In Japan, the RX-7 has always been a popular choice in domestic events, competing in Group 5 based Formula Silhouette to its modern day incarnation, the Super GT series from when the Japan Sport Sedan series would become the GT300 category which it had been competing in. Its patience would pay off as in 2006, RE Amemiya Racing Asparadrink FD3S won the GT300 class championship.

In New Zealand a large and growing motorsport class called Mazda Pro7 Racing makes use of the series 1, 4 and 6 RX-7s for one make circuit racing. They run an average of 8 x 2 day meetings a season and racing can see up to 30 RX-7s on the track at any one time.

The 3 rotor RX8 raced in the Rolex GT series winning the Daytona 24 hour in 2008 and 2010. It also won the 2008 Watkins Glen 12 hour. A lot of the other races are two hour sprints some won by RX8s. They always do well despite having a mandatory red line 500 RPM BELOW the street car red line. They are also required to carry ballast to further slow them down to allow the Corvettes, Mustangs, Camaro V8s, Ferrari's and Porches to keep up. This series is not real car racing as race to race the weight and max RPM of the engines is adjusted to keep winning distributed among the contestants regardless of the technology. It is more like a circus. The rotary would dominate almost all racing series due to the fact that most have minimum weight rules and the power to weight ratio of the Wankel rotary engine is exceptional. The over all weight of a racing car is highly dependent on the weight of the engine.

Perhaps the SCCA has more info in electronic form that I could add to the list. There are dozens of races every year in half a dozen SCCA regions in the US where rotary powered cars are raced. This has happened for the last 50 years. That would be a very long list. It would be best to eliminate those classes that only had rotary power such as Star Mazda.

Star Mazda was an open wheel class that only ran stock 12A, 13B and RX8 engines. There were dozens if not hundreds of those races over a ten or 20 year period. Typically there were up to 50 rotary powered cars in each race.

Rotary Engines typically lasted one or two season while piston engine only classes went through one engine per race or two races per engine.

The Pro Mazda Championship Presented by Cooper Tires debuted as a new series in 2013, replacing the Star Mazda Championship which ceased operation in 2012 after 22 years. The series is sanctioned by INDYCAR and owned and operated by Andersen Promotions. It is the second official step on the Mazda Road to Indy ladder system bridging the gap between the Cooper Tires USF2000 Championship Powered by Mazda and Indy Lights Presented by Cooper Tires. The series' champion is awarded a scholarship package from Mazda to advance to Indy Lights competition the following year.

Pro Mazda utilizes the Mazda Renesis rotary engine as re-manufactured and serviced by SpeedSource Race Engineering. The engine generates approximately 260 horsepower - 90 horsepower more than a USF2000 Mazda MZR powerplant - and is capable of powering cars to speeds of 160 mph.

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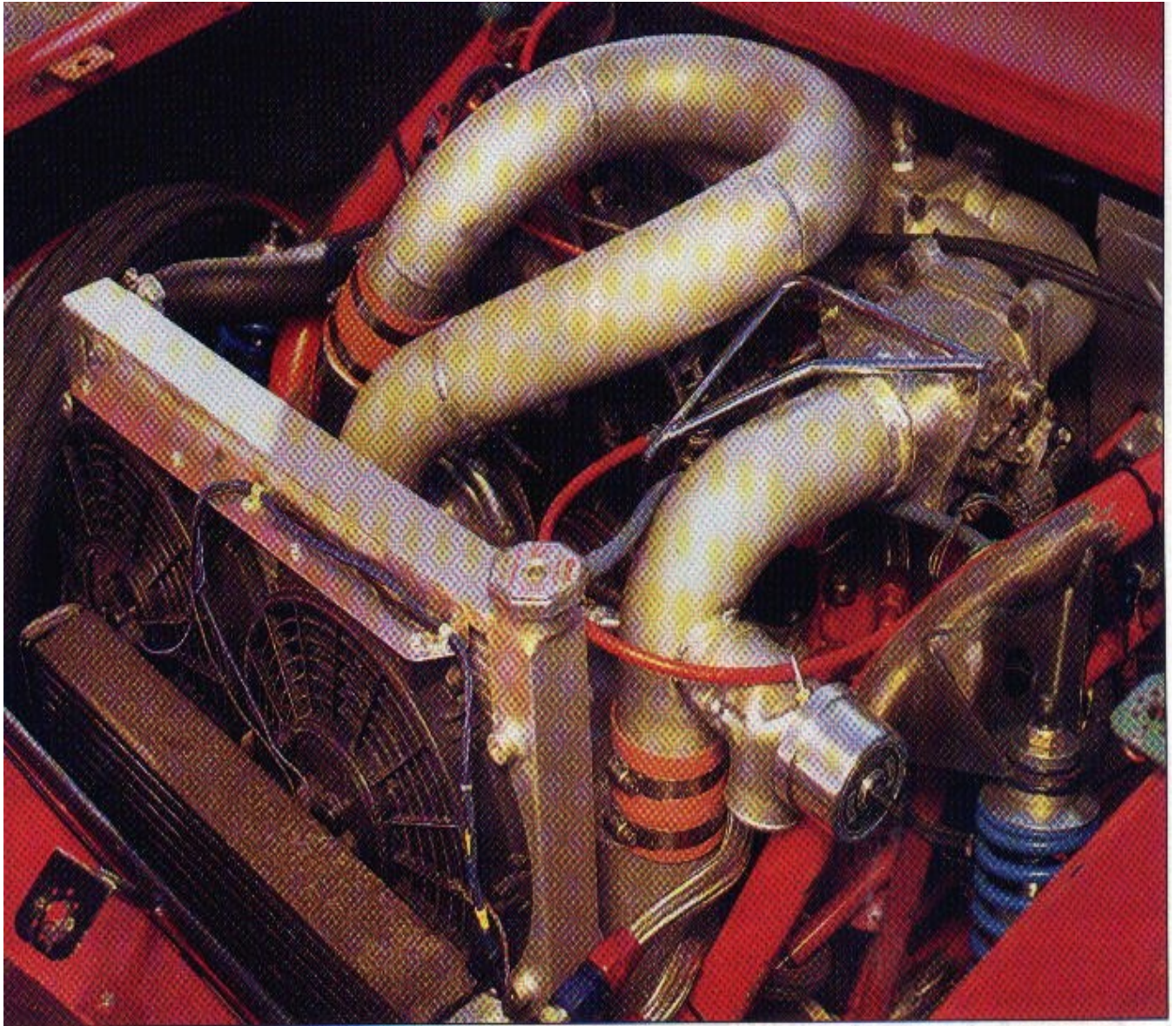
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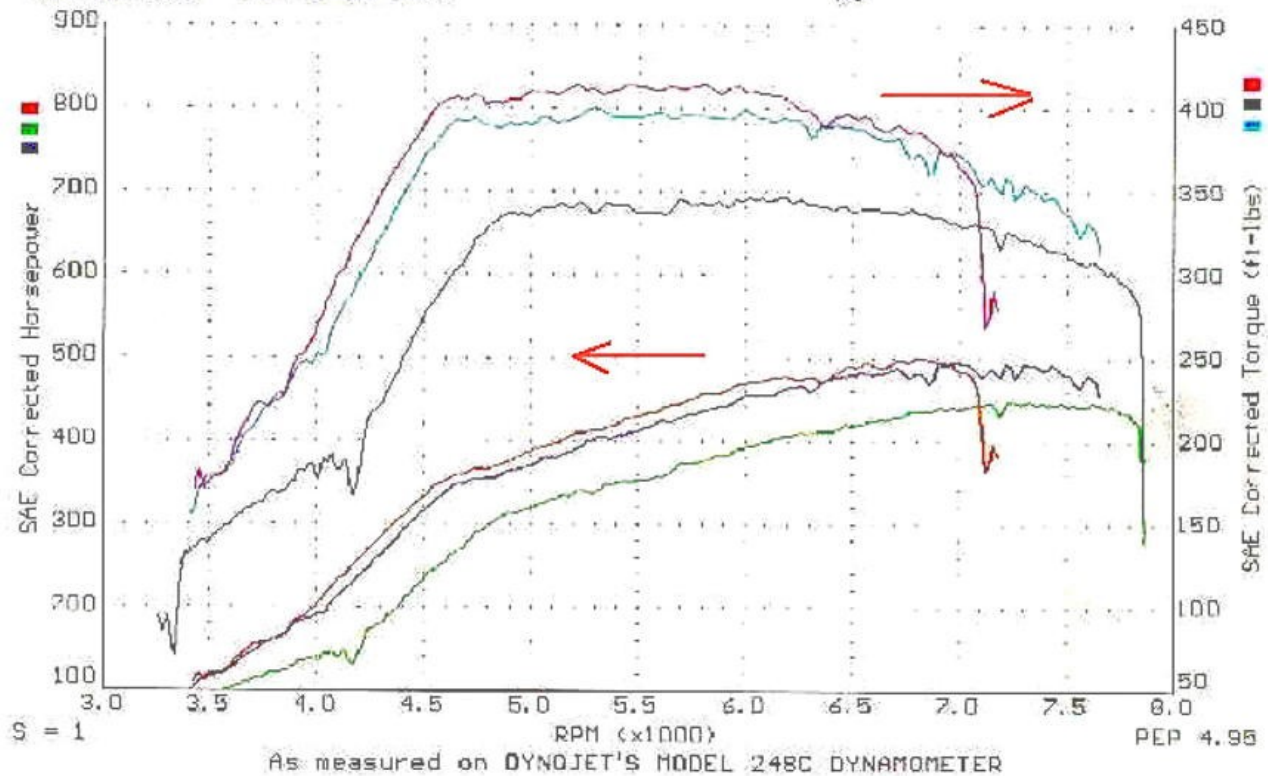
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