

Went to see the opening round of the SUPER GT season!

Chasing Car No. 23 to Okayama

The 2024 SUPER GT season has begun, with the No. 23 MOTUL AUTECH Z supported by JATCO taking part!

Osada of JATCO Engineering's Second Experimental Group, a Nissan and motorsport fan who has been thrilled by the performance of the "Monster Bird" NISSAN R381 at the 1968 Japanese Grand Prix, reports on the first race in Okayama (Okayama International Circuit).



Mr. Osada (left) from Jatco Engineering's Second Experimental Group



JATCO supports No.23 MOTUL AUTECH Z

New team aims to win first annual championship since 2015

This season, the long-standing driver combination for car number 23 has changed, with Katsumasa Chiyo taking over as Ronnie Quintarelli's partner. There were also many other changes, such as the tires being changed from Michelin to Bridgestone, and the regulations tightening the limit on the number of tires that can be used in one race, reducing it from last

year's five sets to four sets.

Although they are rivals, last year's champion Toyota SUPRA has made great strides, while Honda has increased its fighting power by changing its vehicle to the Civic Type R. In response, the No. 23 car will change its base vehicle from a Nissan Z to a Nissan Z NISMO, with changes to the appearance around the front and improvements to its aerodynamics, as it aims to win the annual championship for the first time since 2015.



Outdoor parking



Gourmet Square



Nissan Pit



Pit view



Pit walk



Pit walk



Before the race

Sunny Okayama

Okayama International Circuit is located in Okayama Prefecture, one of the least rainy areas in Japan. It is held in April as the traditional opening round of the series.

Last year, car number 23 took a brilliant victory despite heavy rain and thunder. The official tests held in March were hit by rain, meaning that not enough testing could be done on dry roads, and it is undeniable that there is a lack of data on Bridgestone's tyres. Under these circumstances, in the qualifying round held on Saturday the 13th, Chiyo recorded an impressive top time in Q1, which he was in charge of. Starting this year, the qualifying round was decided by combining the times from Q1 and Q2, so he started the final on Sunday from 6th place.

I left my home in Atsugi at noon on Saturday, stopped off at a roadside station to relax in a hot spring before heading to the circuit, where I encountered deer twice. Unless you're driving to a Formula E circuit, which recently saw its first use of public roads in Japan, most circuits are located in remote areas so please be careful when you're out and about.

Okayama International Circuit has limited on-site parking, but there is an off-site parking lot about 2 kilometers from the circuit, from which you can travel by shuttle bus. At 6:30am, before the buses started running, a long line of enthusiastic fans dressed in team gear had formed, but once the buses started running, they were able to enter the circuit relatively smoothly.

The first thing you do when you arrive at the circuit is to find a place to watch. Since I was still unfamiliar with the circuit, I chose the Nissan cheering section in the grandstand. The weather was nice, so I wanted to explore various corners, so I brought a folding chair with me, but I ended up not using it this time.

Once you have secured a spot, start by wandering around the event square. Here, various automobile manufacturers and parts stores set up shops selling limited edition goods, miniature cars, and outlet products. My son, who was with me, purchased a limited-edition miniature car at the Nissan booth and immediately joined in line. I got a flag, a must-have item for cheering, at the Nissan booth. The bright red Nissan flag is very eye-catching, making it an excellent way to show your support. There will also be many local gourmet restaurants, so you can check out what you'll have for lunch at this time.

This ticket also includes entry to the paddock (an area opens only to those involved in preparing the race vehicles), so while we were walking around there it was time for a pit walk. This is your chance to get autographs and photos from your favorite racers and ambassadors

(this year the name has changed from "campaign girls"). Unfortunately, I was not able to get an autograph from the driver of car number 23 because the number of people exceeded the planned number.

After the warm-up session it's time for the grid walk. You can see right next to the nervous drivers and mechanics working before the start. I also took a commemorative photo with the manager of car number 23 and the Nissan team general manager. I also had the opportunity to see up close a meeting between the starting driver, Ronnie, and the team manager.



Final race start

Once the grid walk is over, we return to the grandstand to watch the start. Following a parade lap led by police motorcycles, the race started with a formation lap led by a pace car, and then the green flag was raised. Each car disappeared into the first corner, leaving behind the slightly sweet smell of CNF (carbon neutral fuel: non-fossil fuel derived from biomass) and a roaring sound.

Once the chaos that followed the start had settled down, it was time for lunch. From the gourmet food stalls I had scouted earlier, I chose Tsuyama Hormone Udon, a B-class Okayama gourmet dish, and ate it while watching the battle situation on the Aurora Vision in the event plaza. After lunch, we strolled around the merchandise area in the event plaza before returning to the stands to resume cheering.

Once the race is past the first third, each company's cars will begin to pit in. In the GT500

class, each company will change drivers, change tires, and refuel. Car number 23 also pitted on lap 31 and driver Ronnie was replaced by Chiyo. It is sent out after quick pit work.

Car No. 23 dropped down the ranks due to confusion at the start, but after the driver change, they drove at a high pace to recover and move up to 5th place, chasing the 4th place car. The gap of nearly eight seconds quickly narrowed, and the Nissan supporters became more enthusiastic. At one point he was on the verge of 4th place, but as his tyres cooled in the second half, he was unable to pick up the pace and was unable to overtake. However, Chiyo's refusal to give up until the very end made for a very exciting race.

After finishing the race, Chiyo immediately rushed over to the Nissan supporters and waved back in response to their cheers.

It was a frustrating but fun race. Let's all go and support the local team!

SUPER GT 2024 Rd.1(Okayama) Digest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8i0Z-o-coic>