



# NISSAN 200SX / SILVIA S14/S15 PROFILE

If you want an uncomplicated front-engined, rear-drive coupé that's cheap, reliable and easy to tune, the Nissan 200SX has it in spades. Now this underrated coupé can be bought for as little as £2500

**K**ee things simple and you'll normally get things right. Nissan's formula of engine at the front, drive to the rear and a strong turbocharged engine is about as right as it gets. The fabulous 200SX – or Silvia in Japan – is a sports coupé that may have a low profile, but it's a car that's incredibly rewarding to own.

And it's great value – in fact, we'd say criminally cheap. Decent early examples will set you back no more than three grand. It's also easily tuneable to 270–280bhp and beyond, and has proved very reliable. It can switch in an instant from a spacious, comfortable daily driver to a hugely enjoyable track and drift car.

Could this be the best Jap performance coupé you can buy? Let's look at it: the 200SX is faster than an Integra Type-R or FTO, cheaper and more reliable than an RX-7, Supra or Skyline, more nimble on its feet than a Celica GT-Four and considerably more modern than its larger brother, the Nissan 300ZX. But don't hang around – its current popularity for drifting means that good examples are starting to become harder to find.

## Launch and evolution

Nissan's practical yet sporty coupé can trace its origins right back to the 1964 Nissan Silvia. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the

Silvia name used in Japan and other parts of the world was changed in the UK. The S14 model was called the 200SX in the UK (and Sweden, incidentally). Launched in Japan in October 1993, but not in the UK until late 1994, it replaced the previous 1.8-litre Silvia S13, or 200SX Mk1 as it was known in Britain.

Boasting a more refined 197bhp SR20DET 2.0-litre turbocharged engine, with less peaky power delivery than the CA18DET which powered its S13



Words by Guy Baker  
Photography by Tom Wood



predecessor, the 200SX offered impressive performance, with 0-60mph arriving in a little over 7 seconds and a top speed of 146mph for the manual version. For an extra £2700 you could buy a Touring Pack version which added a passenger airbag, black leather trim, a CD autochanger and an optional four-speed automatic gearbox.

Faced with criticisms about its bland appearance, Nissan revised the car in October 1996. The facelifted 200SX (or S14a as it became known) had a more aggressive appearance, with a redesigned bonnet, grille, front bumper, rear lamps and – on the Touring Pack model – extra side skirts.

The instrument binnacles were restyled and new seat materials were used, with tan leather featuring on the Touring models. The full-size spare wheel was replaced with a smaller steel item to increase boot space slightly and, although the engine emissions were reduced, power and torque remained unchanged. The only colours available in the UK were green,

blue, red and black. Total UK sales from 1996 to 2001 were 4435, of which around 80 per cent were manuals.

In Japan, the S14 and S14a Silvias were available in a huge variety of specs and colours, with either a 160bhp normally-aspirated 2.0-litre engine or a 220bhp turbo. Quite a few have made their way to UK shores. The last S14a for the Japanese market was manufactured in December 1998, but production for Europe continued until December 1999 – and the 200SX remained on sale in the UK as late as 2001.

Back in Japan, a new Silvia S15 was launched in January 1999 and, although exported to a number of other countries, Nissan never saw fit to bring it to the UK. As a result, UK buyers missed out on a stupendous six-speed 250bhp rear-drive coupé although, happily, a few have since been imported unofficially.

With many chassis components shared with the R34 Skyline, the S15 Spec R boasted significantly improved performance (the 0-60 dash took just 5.6 seconds), better steering feel, improved handling, a helical rear limited-slip diff, better brakes and a completely redesigned cockpit with an A-pillar boost gauge as standard. As well as the Spec R, Nissan also produced a 165bhp normally-aspirated Spec S (usually with a four-speed auto transmission), an Autech Varietta convertible with a fully-retractable hard top and a very high-revving, stripped-out 197bhp normally-aspirated S15 Autech racing model.

Available in black, white, blue, yellow, red and pewter colours, the S15 continued

to be manufactured in Japan until July 2002, with a small number being registered in other markets into 2003.

There was never a direct successor for the 200SX S15. However, a number of Nissan sports car concepts have been shown, the latest being the Foria at last October's Tokyo Show. You never know, this may yet see production.

## MILESTONES

- 1993** Silvia S14 launched in Japan with 160bhp NA and 220bhp turbo engines
- 1994** 200SX launched in UK with one engine – 197bhp turbo
- 1996** Revised version has external and internal changes (S14a model)
- 1997** Minor revisions include joystick controls for stereo
- 1998** Touring pack changes to tan leather in UK and non-Touring pack models are discontinued
- 1999** Silvia S15 production starts in January for Japan, US and Australasia; S14 models for Europe are manufactured until December
- 2001** Nissan 200SX S14 no longer imported into the UK and Europe
- 2002** Silvia S15 ceases production, although some exports continue into 2003



## Technical focus

Although similar in length to the S13 hatchback coupé it replaced, the notchback S14 was slightly wider and boasted a longer wheelbase, giving the car more space inside. The bodysell was all-new and weighed a relatively light 1240–1290kg.

The Japanese market S15 came in a whole range of different variants, with minor changes to bodywork – the most common models being the turbocharged Spec R and normally-aspirated Spec S, with the Aero-bodied Spec R being the most desirable. With a similar weight to the S14, the new S15 bodysell was slightly smaller and considerably stiffer.

You're most likely to come across the in-line, four-cylinder, 16-valve, DOHC SR20DET turbo engine. In European tune, it offered 197bhp at 6000rpm but, in Japan, it had 220bhp in the S14 or, thanks to revisions to the turbo, valves and exhaust system, a whopping 250bhp at 6400rpm in the S15. The roller-bearing turbo used in the S15 also allows for quicker turbo spool-up, thus reducing lag. However, the maximum torque increased only slightly, from 195lb ft to 203lb ft at 4800rpm, with the compression ratio remaining the same at 8.5:1.

Power is reduced slightly if the automatic transmission is chosen on either model. As for the normally-aspirated S14 and S15 SR20DE-powered cars, these have a substantially lower output, rated at just 160bhp and 165bhp, respectively.

A five-speed manual transmission was selected for the S14 model, with a four-speed automatic option being more popular on normally-aspirated cars and the UK 200SX Touring. This system was carried over into the S15, although the more powerful Spec R and Autech versions received a new six-speed transmission with much closer gear ratios, which considerably enhanced low-speed acceleration. Turbocharged versions boasted a viscous limited-slip diff, which was of a helical design in the S15 Spec R and Autech cars.



While the 0–60 times for the turbocharged S14 and S15 in standard trim are satisfactory, at 7.3 seconds and 5.6 seconds, respectively, they don't tell the whole story. Both cars are geared for mid-range and top-end performance, and their real strength is blistering overtaking capability. Top speeds are 146mph for the 200SX and at least 155mph for the six-speed S15. However, you might be surprised by how economical they are: 28mpg for a 200SX on the combined cycle and around 26mpg for an S15.

Both evolutions use a responsive rack-and-pinion steering system with power assistance but, at very high speeds, the heavier S15 steering feels that little bit more secure. They also share a similar suspension set-up, with independent MacPherson struts and coils at the front (with an uprated anti-roll bar and damper settings on the S15) and a coiled multi-link rear suspension. The stiffer S15 also boasts front and rear strut braces.

The S14 and S15 employ disc brakes all round with ABS and – on the S15 – brake assistance. The servo was also uprated for the later model and both cars use four-piston callipers at the front with vented discs.

Sixteen-inch alloys are standard issue, except for the most basic non-turbo imports, and were originally shod with 205/55 rubber. Quite a few cars now sport 17in aftermarket items with 205/50 or 215/50 tyres.

## At the wheel

The 200SX's low-slung seats are supportive and there is plenty of leg and headroom for six-footers, plus great all-round visibility. An adjustable steering wheel, a large left-foot rest and positive switchgear mean the driving position is close to perfect, with your left elbow hardly having to move at all.

The steering is firm and the manual gearchange feels solid (although the throw is fairly long), but the ride is a revelation. Pitted road surfaces are dispatched with ease. The uncomplicated rear-drive chassis has great turn-in and tail-out action. Don't attempt this in the wet, however, as slides are notoriously difficult to catch and control. Braking is progressive and ultimately very effective.

Longish gearing means the 200SX isn't particularly set up for low-speed acceleration, although a few breathing mods to an S14 or a switch to the more powerful S15 Spec R will see 0–60 times plunge to the high fives. The four-speed auto noticeably saps power.

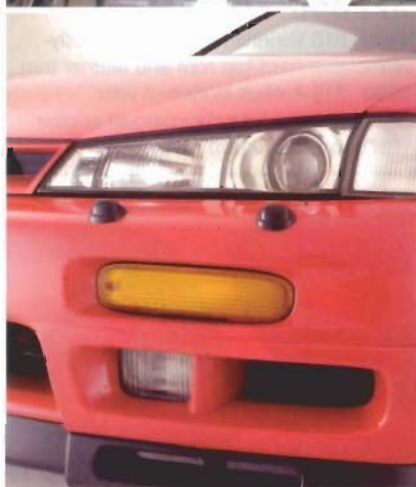
Smooth power is delivered bereft of turbo lag, although this is not the quietest 2.0-litre engine – and both road and wind noise intrude at higher speeds.

The six-speed S15 feels a lot tighter and has even less lag than the S14a. Handling inspires more confidence, too, and the wayward tail is more easily controlled with the throttle. The gear ratios are also much closer.



## SPECIFICATIONS

	S14 (non-turbo)	S14 200SX	S15 Spec S	S15 Spec R
<b>Engine</b>	1998cc	1998cc	1998cc	1998cc
<b>Max power</b>	158bhp at 6400rpm	197–220bhp at 6000rpm	165bhp at 6400rpm	250bhp at 6400rpm
<b>Max torque</b>	139lb ft at 4800rpm	195lb ft at 4800rpm	142lb ft at 4800rpm	203lb ft at 4800rpm
<b>Transmission</b>	Five-speed manual (Four-speed automatic optional on all models)	Five-speed manual	Five-speed manual	Six-speed manual
<b>Length/width/height</b>	4500/1730/1295mm	4500/1730/1295mm	4445/1695/1285mm	4445/1695/1285mm
<b>Weight</b>	1160–1180kg	1240–1270kg	1200–1230kg	1240–1270kg
<b>Max speed</b>	128mph	146mph	130mph	155mph
<b>0–60mph</b>	8.0 seconds	7.3 seconds	7.8 seconds	5.6 seconds



*Nissan's four-cylinder 2.0-litre engine offers great overtaking ability, at least in turbo form. UK cars had 197bhp, Japanese S14 turbos had 220bhp, while the ultimate S15 turbo boasted no less than 250bhp. Leather trim is common (standard on Touring versions), and the driving position is virtually perfect*

### Grey Imports

Only buy a grey import from a recommended importer – preferably with BIMTA status – or a private enthusiast who has owned the car in the UK for over a year. Expect imports to have minor exterior dents and scrapes, but avoid those requiring more substantial repairs.

There must be evidence of removal of the 112mph Japanese speed-limiter, and the speedo and odometer should read in mph not kph, plus a rear fog light should be fitted. An SVA certificate and a valid UK MoT are also required, and check that decent quality UK high-speed tyres and windscreen wipers have been fitted. The date of first registration in the UK should be recorded on the vehicle's V5 logbook.

Imports with modifications need special care. Wheel, exhaust, brake and suspension upgrades from reputable manufacturers are fine, but Japanese-fitted ECU upgrades, boost controllers, fuel-cut defenders and induction systems could spell trouble.

Shop around for insurance quotes on imports. Some – but not all – Nissan dealers will be happy to fettle your import and provide spare parts.



## BUYING TIPS

The 200SX has an admirable reliability record. However, do look out for body damage, missing service history, uneven tyre wear, worn shocks and suspension bushes, tired clutches and stone-chip damage. Expect many UK cars – and nearly all Japanese imports – to have had some performance modifications, but avoid cars with major engine mods because a full engine rebuild will set you back £3500–£4000. A proper vehicle inspection and history check is a must.

Family buyers should remember that the rear seats have little legroom – and many newer baby seats simply won't fit, although the boot is large for a coupé.

## Engine

A well-cared-for SR20DET engine will be good for 150,000 miles and more but, if the turbo boost is increased much above the standard 10psi, without suitable changes to fuelling, detonation can occur. So any engine tuning (beyond the obligatory air filter and free-flowing exhaust) must include an uprated fuel pump, fuel pressure regulator and spark plugs. If you go above 280bhp, you need larger injectors and a properly remapped or upgraded ECU.

Minor oil leaks from the timing chain cover are not an issue, but blocked oil feeds to the camshaft will lead to premature camshaft wear and possible big-end failure. Regular oil changes, with a 10/60 or 15/50 fully synthetic oil, are needed every 6000 miles, although some owners change it more often than this.

A compression test will reveal blown head gaskets. Starting problems are usually due to a tired fuel pump, failed lambda sensor, blown airflow meter or cracked intercooler pipe. S14 models commonly suffer a cracked exhaust manifold, but the later S14a model has support brackets to overcome this problem.

You will hit fuel cut if the boost is set too high (unless a fuel-cut defender has been fitted or the car has been remapped) and turbos and turbo gaskets tend to go at around 80,000 miles. OE exhausts do rust, but many owners will have fitted stainless systems.

## Brakes

Unlike many other Japanese performance cars, the standard brakes on the Nissan 200SX are up to the job, and warped front discs are a rarity. But do check the rears for signs of rust, especially on imports.

## Bodywork

Many imports will have had some bodywork repairs, and early S14s are now starting to show signs of rust. Check the wheelarches – especially at the rear – plus suspension turrets, boot floor and sills.

## Wheels and tyres

Uneven wear may indicate incorrect geometry settings (around £130 to fix) or accident damage. Rear tyres only last 10,000 miles, although the fronts should be good for 20,000. UK cars had 16in alloys as standard, although many cars now have 17in alloys fitted. Most Jap imports have aftermarket

wheels but make sure the rubber bears a V, W or Z speed rating.

## Interior

The cockpit may be a tad dull, but it wears extremely well. Try out all the electrical items, especially the air conditioning and the alarm. Boot locks not working from the key fob are commonplace, as are malfunctioning interior lights and failed heaters (often just the heater fuse). Japanese wipers tend to lift at higher speeds.

## Suspension

Suspension bushes inevitably wear at higher mileages, as do OE dampers, so many cars now have aftermarket suspension kits.

Test-drive the car on a variety of surfaces to make sure you're happy with the ride and the ride height.

## Transmission

Most S14 SR20s suffer from sprocket rattle when engaging gear and first pulling away but, although annoying, it's nothing to worry about. Clutches wear out at 30,000–80,000 miles, depending on use, so check for slipping or a high biting point. Autos should be smooth once warmed up, but avoid any recalcitrant auto boxes or manuals with clutch judder.

## SPECIAL EDITIONS

**1999** S15 Varietta launched with fully-retractable hard-top roof and leather trim  
**2000** S15 Autech launched with high-revving, non-turbocharged engine (197bhp at 7200rpm) and 1200kg weight





*S15 model is substantially restyled and boasts a better chassis and more power. It was never sold officially in the UK, so it's a grey import only*



### What to buy and what to pay

Prudent buyers will prefer the UK 200SX models or the equivalent Japanese import Silvia S14 turbo – preferably with a manual gearbox. The rare S15 Spec R is the best choice for serious enthusiasts.

Normally-aspirated Silvia S14 and S15 Spec S imports are underpowered, especially with automatic, and all will prove far harder to sell on. Also avoid the extremely rare Varietta convertible or highly-tuned Autech versions, as there is little or no used demand – but a lot more to go wrong. Insurance on these can also be a headache.

S14 prices start below £2500, with the newer S15 commanding at least £9000. Our choice? A private, 2000 model UK 200SX for a bargain £4500.

### Typical prices

- £2400 1994 M 200SX, red, 112,000 miles, private
- £3000 1997 P Silvia S14, purple, 83,000 miles, dealer
- £3495 1998 S 200SX, blue, 70,000 miles, dealer
- £4095 1997 P 200SX Touring, green, 98,000 miles, private
- £4500 2000 V 200SX Touring, blue, 72,000 miles, private
- £5495 1999 T 200SX Touring, red, 65,000 miles, dealer
- £6595 2000 V 200SX Touring, red, 45,000 miles, private
- £9750 2000 V, S15 Spec S, silver, 65,000 miles, private
- £10,499 2001 Y, S15 Varietta, Blue, 15,000 miles, dealer
- £11,495 1999 V, S15 Spec R, red, 68,000 miles, dealer
- £13,496 1999 T, S15 Spec R, blue, 51,000 miles, dealer

### Thanks

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### OWNERS' CLUB

The SX Owners' Club was formed in early 2001 for the 200SX. Two previous websites were merged into the SXOC, which now boasts around 1000 members and a forum with over 10,000 registered users. The club forum is renowned for its friendliness and huge depth of knowledge on all things 200SX related.

Members receive a welcome pack containing an SXOC keyring, sticker, membership card and club discount list, and gain access to the members' area of the club forum. Other benefits include your own SXOC e-mail address and club website page, a bi-monthly newsletter, plus access to a huge number of club events such as dyno tests and trackdays, plus regular local meets and a club insurance discount scheme. There is also a rapidly-growing S15 owners' club to be found at [www.s15oc.com](http://www.s15oc.com)

Annual fee: £15

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