Spirited away

in a 2012 Mazda RX8 Spirit R S2

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I remember my brief (and first) encounter with a rx8 and recall being bewildered by its suicide doors.

The car in question, a black first generation (S1 for petrolhead nomenclature) was a bit mundane compared to it's portrayal in NFS most wanted and the blue veilside kitted rx8 from Fast and Furious Tokyo Drift. The bubbly proportions and design language did not immediately make sense, almost as if each nook and cranny of the car contrasted each other, and the car certainly did not make sense if it was parked next to an rx7. Die-hard rotary fans were quick to disown the happy go lucky, rear wheel drive, new age sports car bearing Mazda and Dr. Felix Wankel's legacy (no, not the legacy with the German dictator with a knack for painting) and understandably so, as the party piece for any Mazda, the new 13B Renesis rotary engine parted ways with the twin scroll turbochargers that made the previous generation RX7 so intoxicating all the way to redline (recommended on rotary cars to keep the carbon build up away). To be fair, Rotaries are rev happy, and it's peppy nature makes it just as joyful without the need for forced induction.

Enter, the second generation (S2) RX8. The entire car went on a high calorie

diet, comprised of protein shakes and bench presses. Subtle changes redefined the entire car both inside and out. The front bumper, now more elongated and buffed up to match the fenders. Every nook and cranny complimented each other. Headlights and tail lights took a crash course on "zoom-zoom" (Mazda's then design language) as did every other crevices on the car. The "facelift" RX8 (if you will) suddenly didn't look like the confused teenager with no aim in life that the pre facelift RX8 manifestly was on the surface, albeit, everything wrong with the exterior of the previous gen was instantly exfoliated with the Mazdaspeed kit. Just look at img_8098, like an animated Batmobile with its flared arches and menacing stance. It's like that friend you have who's an entirely different person the instant they take their glasses off, and in turn transforms into a Japanese geisha. With a katana. One fun easter egg I play every time I see an rx8 on the road is to count the number of triangles that loosely resemble the structure of a rotary engine, and they're camouflaged both on the exterior and interior.

Farasat Waez struck gold (more on that later) when a trip to car house in search of a manual GT86 made him leave the dealership with keys to a 2012 Sparkling Black Mica RX8 "Spirit R", a badge crowned by the rotary gods to the most coveted, buffed up Mazda's to leave the factory. four out of a thousand Japan only Spirit R units made their way to our port, as did a myriad of base model units since importers realized the 1300 cc displacement loopholed its way out of our rigid import tax structures. If you google RX8 right now, you're bound to see one with Bangladeshi rego plates. That's how much the local scene love it. Although they're the butt of "7K" swapped jokes more often than it should get credit for.

The RX8 Spirit R is therefore a plaque, to celebrate the gamble Mazda took in 1967 and the demise of the RX8's production. It is therefore, a lightened, souped up Torch to carry Mazda's legacy. The ultimate rotary swansong came with a 6 speed manual transmission, 4 piston Brembos all around, a reworked engine with an output of 238 hp, the highest for any RX8 to leave the factory. In addition to a torque vectoring LSD, bespoke track ready Bilstein suspension made the forged exclusive to the spirit R 19" BBS bronze aluminum alloys even more special. Farasat really struck gold and he loves Rotary ownership thus far. He's an advocate for the unmistakable sound of the Rotary. Quiet as a mouse at low revs, while packing firepower (read 'decibels') to raise the dead high in the rev range. The handling is amazing thanks to the host of performance upgrades from factory. While Rotary maintenance is a sore topic, the owner tells me Rotary maintenance is all about patience. The crucial warming up after a cold start, letting it sit idle following a spirited drive, changing the oil every 1000 km makes all the difference while keeping rotary woes at bay. The same way a baby needs a mother. Just like with any car really. While Farasat enjoys his Spirit R the way it was meant to be from factory; Bone stock, he wishes to upgrade the brakes and itches for an exhaust.

Words and photos: Ahbar Milky

Tech vs COVID-19: How the coronavirus is bringing out the best tech has to offer

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The spread and devastating impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) are unprecedented. Hospitals and health systems around the world are struggling to care for the people getting infected with the virus every day. However, some noteworthy initiatives in the tech industry have been taken as responses to the pandemic. As coronavirus spreads, so do tech innovations to combat it. Data to understand the genetic history of the virus

The right information about the genetic tree of the virus can help epidemiologists understand how it evolves in different countries and possible mutations that can change its nature. **Nextstrain** is an open-sourced project that shows the evolution of pathogens like coronavirus by utilizing necessary data along with sequencing and visualizations for it. By sharing the genetic sequencing of 700 cases of the virus with the scientific community, the project has contributed to corroborating that the virulence of the virus has not changed while spreading to other countries. Machine learning to find a therapy

AbCellera is a Canada-based biotech company who are using a machine learning model to develop therapies based on antibodies from patients who have defeated the COVID-19. By means of AI, they have analyzed more than five million immune cells looking for cells that can produce antibodies with the potential to help patients recover. 500 antibodies have already been identified by AbCellera as possible candidates for use in future COVID-19 therapies. App to bring doctors around the world together

MedShr is a professional network for doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals that is currently used by over one million members in 190 countries. It is an app used by a million doctors around the world to aid one another in different diagnostic processes. The same developers introduced **LetsBeatCOVID.net**, a tech platform that asks people to complete a short survey about their health and exposure to COVID-19. The responses can be updated if someone's medical situation changes. The individual will have to log back in using a randomly generated password. By verifying their location, users of the platform can play a role in generating more accurate data about the spread of symptoms without disclosing identity. Moreover, personalized guidelines are sent to users who decide to share their email. LetsBeatCOVID.net could make it easier for members of the community to provide the information urgently needed by hospitals and governments. Furthermore, it can allow hospitals to understand the number of people who have come in contact with someone with COVID-19, shown symptoms, or believe that they have already had the coronavirus and recovered. Platforms to bring telemedicine to the rescue

Communities are increasingly turning to telemedicine in order to avoid the hospitals with a never-seen-before influx of patients. Hospitals like Xuhui public hospital of Shanghai in China have consulted with patients from as far away as Tibet and France. A Spain-based company named **Open Salud** (Open Health) has launched a tele-consulting platform that allows any doctor or clinic to tend to their patients who need medical attention. These platforms are streamlining diagnostic and treatment processes where patients have to open the application, describe their symptoms and wait for a doctor to get back to them via virtual consultation. Initiatives to manage tech talent

A coalition of initiatives named **COVID 19 Tech Response** (CTR) has come forward in the UK with the aim to coordinate the existing tech talent and direct them to solve the problems surrounding the pandemic. So far, around 400 tech volunteers have joined the group. CTR will also aim to coordinate the volunteers to coach and support the UK citizens who are in need of these services. The group is working closely with the Coronavirus Tech Handbook, an initiative by political technology college **Newspeak House** which has quickly become a global resource.

The four main "call-to-actions" of the group are: Join the Code4COVID Slack as a volunteer or to source volunteers, or work on projectsAdd your tech skills to the COVID-19 Tech Response Airtable formSubmit mainstream UK tech problems to COVID Tech SupportContribute to and access the resources on the CoronavirusTechHandbook

Besides managing talent, the group will also be encouraging the tech community to talk to healthcare workers/public service workers and share tools to build teams who can be equipped to solve problems pertaining to the pandemic. Apps joining forces with the hotlines

The regional government in Madrid, Spain has launched an initiative named **Corona Madrid.** It is available both as an app or a web page. Individuals who suspect that they might have the virus can have a physical self-assessment conducted with help from the platform. Based on the symptoms and generated results, the users receive instructions about steps to be taken for treatment and isolation. Similar initiatives were also taken by South Korea to mitigate the crisis. The initiatives aim to reduce call congestion for the coronavirus hotlines and provide health authorities with a concise local overview of the pandemic. 3D printers to make ventilators

Ventilators have become essential equipment for providing treatment to the most severe cases of COVID-19. But the health systems around the world are facing a shortage of supplies. To solve this, developers around the world have developed communication platforms and channels using different collaboration software and platforms like Telegram. They share an open-source design that directly helps in manufacturing ventilators with 3D printers. Anyone with a 3D printer can play his/her role by printing the necessary components of a ventilator. In just a few days, members of a Spain-based group named **Resistencia Team** were able to find an open-source respirator prototype that was later tested at the Central University Hospital of Asturias in Spain. If everything goes as expected, the respirators will soon go for human testing. Chatbots to answer queries

The **WHO chatbot** was launched by the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide information about the coronavirus and to answer the FAQs. The chatbot can provide updates like current rates of infected people and protection measures to keep the virus from spreading exponentially. The chatbot is available on Whatsapp, which is owned by Facebook. Besides the chatbot, Facebook also has the Coronavirus Information Center that removes the spread of fake news and provides only verified and official sources of information. Apps to keep up with work and social life

Besides platforms for medical help, there are apps bringing peoples' need to going out to a minimum. Now that everyone is quarantined in their homes, applications enabling video conferencing and online work collaboration have become more necessary than ever. There has been a huge increase in the number of downloads of apps like **Zoom**, **Skype and Google Hangouts Meet** and collaboration software like **Microsoft Teams**, **Monday.com**, **Slack** etc over the last few months. Apart from using the apps to stay in touch and work remotely, some users are going out of their way to realising the truly creative potential of the apps by organizing concerts, workshops, virtual get-togethers, birthday parties and even weddings.