

# The Z-Air

HASEEB CHOWDHURY

It was well past my bedtime. I mean, when else is Dhaka compliant enough to be your personal race track? The traffic during the day is abhorrent and early nighttime is plagued with trucks. A small window of opportunity presents itself where Airport Road is your personal playground and I was about to make Zubaer take the full advantage of it. If anything that is where this car shines; the inherent high-revving character of the 2ZZ-GE shows through only when it is being pushed to its absolute.

## Preamble

Zubaer and I both have the same generation of Toyota Corollas, albeit different shapes and differently modified. I first saw this car at Gulshan “dead end” in 2017. That used to be our meeting spot; every Friday afternoon a plethora of sports cars and modified autos showed up, drank juice, conversed and left by sun-down. Even then, I knew I wanted the 2ZZ-GE engine for my Corolla and this car had been my benchmark some 4 years ago, as it is now.

Zubaer is older, and much wiser than I am, as is evident by his modification choices. 4 years later on yet another fateful Friday, this time well into the morning, I had a realization. The car had not changed one bit. It still had the same engine and gearbox. The same body kit decorated the sills and bumpers, the same wheels provided a base for the car to stand on. I was on my third suspension setup and sixth set of wheels, yet nowhere near the same degree of perfection as his Corolla.

## What is it?

A Toyota Corolla RunX hatchback that has been converted to a Toyota Corolla RunX T-Sport or Aerotourer Z, depending on the naming convention in your local market. It started life as a regular 1500cc 1NZ-FE engine making a touch over 100 horsepower, which was then lovingly (read: eagerly) swapped out for a 2ZZ-GE engine, almost doubling the engine



output to over 180 horsepower paired with a six speed manual. The 2ZZ-GE comes with a variable lift cam profile that provides additional power once you go over a certain RPM threshold (5800rpm). If you are familiar with Honda's VTEC technology, this is, in spirit and in function, the same thing. If you have been a long-time reader of Shift, you may have come across other project cars with the same transplant. So why are we looking



at yet another seemingly regular 2ZZ-GE swap?

## What makes this different?

Attention to detail. Let me paint you a picture. Imagine yourself- a professional internet dweller, amateur forum enjoyer and aspiring project car owner. Like the majority of this city, you likely own an NZE/NZT chassis which is what we know as the Corolla, Axio, Allion and Premio family. The only logical engine upgrade is a 2ZZ-GE from a T-Sport or a Celica, and the only logical way to obtain one is to go to Dholaikhal, source an engine and go through with the surgery. Zubaer chose the route of overkill, and it shows. See, unlike the aforementioned cars, a version of the RunX comes with a 2ZZ-GE from the factory. Instead of taking the easy route of just sourcing an engine and calling it a night, Zubaer purchased an entire RunX Aerotourer Z in Japan, cut it in half and brought over the remaining parts to swap every single bolt, making this car indistinguishable from a factory Aerotourer Z, and arguably one of the most well done projects I have ever had the good fortune of seeing.

## The Journey

As with nearly all of my features now, Abbaar happens to be the one taking pictures while I sneak in an opportunity to ask the owner about his car and his journey throughout the years. Zubaer originally wanted to give the Type R treatment to his hitherto EK4 Civic Sedan,



but the novelty of the Type R hardly left it a financially justifiable option. Life happened, and the Civic did not and he moved on to this RunX. Once the bug bit the game was on, and out came the other side this almost obsessively completed project car that does not even seem like a project car anymore. See, a project car has quirks. This doesn't turn on, that doesn't work. A light is off the tick, and maybe it even makes a few worrying noises here and there. This car has none of that. If the word “sorted” had a face, it would be this RunX. This is what we call a nut and bolt restoration, where every single bolt has been changed, not even leaving the headlight wiring alone, added Zubaer.

## Personal Playground

I see why it hadn't changed. You cannot exceed perfection. It handles like it is on rails. An Ultra Racing rear torsion beam and other rigidity-promoting additions



like Ultra SR shocks, TRD springs and the stiff sidewall Advan Neova AD08R tires all contribute to its agility. I realized why this car was so good as I went weaving in triple digits through traffic. The suspension is near perfect for Dhaka; it provides a good, firm ride but has enough leeway to ensure safe damping from Dhaka forces (read: potholes).

The aural stimulation is as good as, if not better, than the physical emotion it entails. Zubaer recently switched to a Kakimoto exhaust with custom made piping, and it sounds glorious. “Bangla exhaust” is used as an insult to diss locally made exhausts. The name is well deserved, because most do sound like a chainsaw trying to cut through a metal pole. If anything, this sounds better than many off-the-shelf reputable exhausts. It reinvents my perception of what can be achieved with locally available tools and mechanics, if the brain behind the operation knows what they are doing.

I have been in my fair share of cars, yet this is one of the most giggle-inducing experiences I have ever had. It is not

the fastest car I have been in, far from. But the theatrics of the whole ordeal is extraordinary. I have sang the praise of the 2ZZ for years, and it might have been my emotional bias coming into play, but this car was nothing short of a theatre performance. Below 3000 RPM, this car sounds hardly different from my humble Corolla with the factory exhaust, with no indication that it has any relation with Kakimoto. Above that, it lets you know that it is far from the former. And then as you cross the lift threshold at 5800 RPMs, it unleashes another burst of power. Two-face, split personality, whatever you call it, two completely different machines lie on either side of that lift engagement threshold. Thus, I learned the magic of a 2zz, and it shines so much brighter with a 6 speed gearbox. No disrespect to the automatic, but it does not hold a candle to the personality of one paired to a manual box. This car is the living embodiment of the saying “They don't make em like they used to.”

The tires provide immense grip, and eliminate some wheel hop that is present for the lack of an LSD, although that lack of one makes itself known. This car is quick, and weaving through mild traffic and paired with Zubaer's honed driving skills, not many would be able to keep up. Zubaer shifts just right, so that the revs do not fall out of the “lift” threshold. The gauge only shows up to 180km/h but I am confident this car can go much faster. Whether or not we tested that theory shall remain a mystery.

What truly slaps you in the face is the refinement. This feels like a stock car that came out of the factory. There is no indication, no signal that says the entire front end and wiring harness has been taken apart and put back together with completely different components. No evidence that says that this has been “modified.” This redefines what a project car should be.

## Final thoughts

Zubaer has had this car for 9 years, and in that timeframe, has managed to perfect the formula. He bought this car while it was a commoner, and turned it into a wolf in sheep's clothing. The cars we drive say a lot about us, and it shows the amount of effort that went into making this car what it is today. If you think simply swapping every nut and bolt from a half-cut will grant you a car this refined, you are wrong. Every minute detail requires attention, and every loose bolt needs tightening. It shows maturity, less about life, but more so regarding how one takes care of their possessions. Just how every human is an individual character, every car has a soul of its own. If you do not share a love of cars, all this may hardly make sense. But every car is a distinguished soul that requires attention in different ways, for no two parts break the same way. The money that went into this build may not be justifiable by many, but it achieved something most do not. Completion. The RunX is fulfilled.

# Virtual heritage and the future of our past

SUMAN ROY

Historical change refers to the changing of events over time. Historical change takes place through the process of cause and effect -- the process by which one thing leads to another, which leads to another, and so forth.

The once-thriving community of Armenians of Bangladesh can be a real example. Their numbers have gradually diminished over the years and there are now no Armenians in the country. Once, there was a fairly large Armenian colony in Dhaka, concentrated in the neighbourhood of Armanitola, during the early part of the 18th century. The Armenian community played a significant role in Bengali trade and commerce in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Armenian Apostolic Church of the Holy Resurrection established by the community in 1781, along with the



adjacent cemetery, is a major landmark and tourist attraction of old Dhaka.

From a tourism perspective, Armanitola could have been a thematic heritage site in Old Dhaka with scopes for people to experience bits and pieces of the Armenian culture and cuisine – much like China Towns or Little Indias in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, the historical change took a rather disappointing turn when it came to preserving our heritage and history.

Exploring old Dhaka is increasingly popular among Bangladeshis. With so many mosques, temples and heritage buildings, this area offers tons of travel opportunities. Though Old Dhaka has lost its once panoramic view and historical architecture, it is still our beloved Dhaka where history is struggling to stay alive around every nook and corners of this part of the city. In Bangladesh, cultural heritage



organisations are rare and Bangladesh is missing economic opportunities with heritage sites vanishing. In this current pandemic situation heritage tourism has now become a threat for development and preservation efforts.

But all hopes are not lost. By adopting new technologies we can continue to preserve our heritage and open up new horizons. Implementing virtual environment projects; documentation, modelling and presentation urgently

articulated to digitising their valuable collections and making the data available to experts, can help safeguard our heritage sites in the new tech frontier. In the face of today's complex challenges, the task seems more urgent than ever.

The future of tourism lies in the development of the virtual environment embedded with heritage; culture and history represented through digital media are often categorised as ‘virtual heritage’.

In today's world, new media and digital

tools offer us the possibility to experience virtually reconstructed historic sites or virtual heritage sites as visitors, travellers or even as a resident.

Vast arrays of digital technologies are being applied worldwide in preserving heritage sites and experiences -- from documentation to preservation, representation, and dissemination. Computers, and especially 3D computer graphic tools, offer a rich variety of aids to conserve cultural heritage. We at Lost Panorama have started the first VR experience in Bangladesh during the walking tour in Old Dhaka and hope that others follow suit to develop a virtual heritage ecosystem, to redeem lost opportunities.

Although virtual heritage, culture and history pose great potentials to reconstruct our past heritage and memory, many critics often blame high cost, development complexity, inaccessibility of technology, complexity in usability and high maintenance for prohibiting widespread dissemination, distribution and use of virtual heritage media. But what we must consider urgently is that we're losing time and we're losing our chance. If we don't act now, opportunities will be lost. The technology is here, all we need now is the act and the will. The time is now. And so in the future.

*The author is the Founder and Chief Innovation Leader of Lost Panorama, a historical research-based organisation.*

