



# Millen's Missile

Steve Millen will again tackle Targa New Zealand, but this time he's bringing some serious firepower. Consistently a top-ten finisher, he'll be aiming for an elusive win in his Stillen GT-R

Words Kyle Cassidy Photos Tom Gasnier

462kW 0-100km/h 3.90s

**NISSAN'S POTENT GT-R HAS REWRITTEN THE RULES OF** performance, and its reputation for taking down established heavyweights has been well documented over the past year or two. The perfect car for the Targa rally then. It was a GT-R that won the last Targa New Zealand, with Tony Quinn taking line honours. This year there will more GT-Rs in the pack, one of them this orange missile, driven by Steve Millen.

Millen isn't new to the rally: he has piloted a Ford GT in previous years, and a few Falcons prior to that, but this year will be his first in the all-paw GT-R.

'The Ford GT is fun, it's a fabulous car to drive, but it's nothing like the GT-R for a Targa,' says Millen, who was recently in New Zealand for the annual SpeedShow, where his two orange race cars shared star billing.

The innards of the GT-R's engine have been left alone, but pretty much everything hanging off it has been changed



While the GT-R is pretty handy out of the box, you can't show up to Targa without some extra firepower under the bonnet.

'We have big turbo setups, but we haven't done it to this car,' says Millen, owner of Stillen, an American-based tuning company. 'We've put big turbos on a customer car back in the States and it made 750 horsepower easy. It was superb up top, but there was a heap of lag, and it only had a small power band at the top. It's exactly what you don't want in a Targa car.'

So for Millen's GT-R, the internals and the turbos of the stock VR35DETT remain untouched, but it has new stainless plumbing, larger intercoolers, a Stillen intake, new blow-off valves and an entirely new exhaust system.

'We eliminated the exhaust system from the turbos back. We've made our own downpipes to eliminate the cats, and then we have a straight pipe right through to the new centre exit exhaust tips. It gets the gases out quicker, which turbos love but it's also about 30kg lighter. We had to change the exhaust. The GT-R may be a supercar but it doesn't sound like one; it sounds so boring.'

Not any more. Even at idle, neck hairs are standing to attention.

Other changes include a re-map for the engine management system using a Cobb control unit, and the addition of a variable-boost controller. The car produces a claimed 620bhp running at 15psi on a diet of 98.

Except for an additional cooler for the transmission, the driveline setup is standard. Any problems?

'None. We've done 26,000 miles and have had no issues.'

The transmission protocols and AWD system are also unchanged. Stability and traction control remain as well – not that Millen uses these.

'I switch them off completely, even when it's raining. When it's wet, I just flick the switch on the dash, and it drops the boost back to about 13psi.'

That still puts around 550 traction-defeating horsepower on the menu.

To keep it grounded, the GT-R rides on a fully adjustable Penske setup, co-developed by Stillen.

'Building a Targa car is difficult because of all the different conditions. You have to make a car that is compliant with the road. It's a compromise in terms of setup and handling. With the Penskes we can alter the ride height and rake of the car, and we can adjust the bump and rebound completely. I don't run a lot of spring, I rely



The GT-R is sporting a few unique body adornments with a deeper front spoiler, canards and new side skirts added, all made by Stillen from urethane. Body control (top) is tied right down thanks to the Stillen-developed sway bars



more on the sway bar and shocks for control. We are running lower than standard, and we have Teflon blocks on the undertray so that when it does ground out, it skids on these.'

Also bolted up underneath are adjustable Stillen sway bars.

'We stiffened up the rear a lot because the car tends to push up front.'

A GT-R can do with fewer pounds, so Millen has pruned mass wherever possible.

'The GT-R is a heavy car; that is its Achilles heel. It was 3900lb [1770kg] when we started, but we took about 500lb [225kg] out of it.'

While the Stillen-designed roll cage puts about 45kg of that back, the standard seats, for example, are 30kg each, where the new carbon race seats weigh just eight kilos apiece.

'We had plastic side windows as well, but because there is no door frame, we couldn't keep them in at speed; they kept popping out.'

As well as a stripped-out interior, the bonnet, boot lid, rear wing and side mirrors are made of carbon-fibre.

As for the braking department, it's been bolstered by big, 400mm carbon-ceramics rotors.

'These are a combination effort with AP Racing, and we have a worldwide exclusive for carbon-ceramic rotors for this car. The rotor is 20mm bigger than the standard iron disc, but we use the standard calliper. We make all the adapting hardware, and AP makes the carbon-ceramic rotors, which save five kilos per corner.

'We have a fan system for the brakes, too. If I've done a really tight stage, and the brakes are starting to go, I turn the fans on [and these] direct cooling air right on to the rotor and calliper.'

Millen, a veteran racer who enjoyed success with the Nissan 300ZX IMSA car in the

US, rates the ability of his latest Nissan racer.

'The GT-R is pretty nimble for a big car. If it starts to push in a corner, you just stand on the gas, and the power will turn it in. It doesn't matter how far out it gets at the back, [because] as long as you point it to where you want to go, the four-wheel drive will pull you out.

'The car absorbs the bumps really well. The harder you run it, the better it goes. It loves to be loaded hard into corners, and then you can get hard on the gas. OK, the back may step out, but it doesn't matter; the harder you drive it, the quicker it goes.'

With that in mind, it's time to strap in for a stint behind the wheel. With more power motivating less weight, the Stillen GT-R was always going to be quicker than the stock GT-R. But at Steve's request, we didn't activate the launch function, and without it the car wasn't all that interested in firing out of the blocks. Given that the car



One very angry exhaust note exits through those big fat pipes

literally dribbled off the line, its 3.9sec 0-100km/h time is rather impressive. Once trucking, it can motor, and ripped through the 80-120km/h trial in just 1.75sec, our quickest time for a four-wheeler yet.

The stock V6 offers a potent midrange shove; however, this thing takes it to another level. Torque is laid on thick right throughout the rev spectrum. We've driven other insanely tuned GT-Rs, which have produced plenty up top but nothing down low. No such worries here: the mumbo is cranking from 3000rpm, and the thunder just keeps on rolling, all the way to the red line. Compressor surge is non-existent. The car's even OK with a half-open throttle. It responds to just a dab of the go-pedal, dishing out lashings of grunt, slinging it forward with a ferocity that makes the regular GT-R feel as meek

as a Micra. It makes the Stillen car easier to drive, you don't need to be sitting on the limiter to go places. It's further aided by the gearbox. Though not the sharpest double-clutch transmission available, it's still plenty capable, and there's no heaving clutch pedal to deal with.

Losing pounds helps not only in the speed stakes, but also through the bendy bits, where the car is pointier. Thanks to a stiffer bar on the rear, and firmer damping, there's less tendency to push. The issue now is the lack of grip at the other end, for the torque delivery is decidedly rear-biased, the rear breaking loose at the mildest provocation. It's unlike any other AWD car we've yet driven in its ability to be turned so easily on the throttle.

And despite the chop in ride height and

the stiffer setup, it can still bash the road into submission. There's no tramlining, no ricocheting off the bumps – although the Teflon blocks on the undercarriage did get a tickle. The exhaust blast dominates, loud as a jet, all but drowning out the induction drama.

Mere mortals can go about replicating the orange streak via the range of Stillen performance upgrades now available in New Zealand via City Nissan. Everything featured on the Stillen Targa car can be bolted up to your R35, and the majority of it won't void the factory warranty. Though New Zealand pricing was still being finalised as we went to print, an estimate of roughly \$25K to \$30K would bag most of the items here, minus the carbon-ceramic brakes, which alone are \$20K.

With the interior accommodation reinstated, would this modified GT-R cut it as an everyday car? Aggro as it can be, it's docile at idle and happy just to trundle along – although hard to hold back. There's even full auto convenience. A fair bit of heat is generated in the cockpit, it's ludicrously loud, and the ride is uncompromising, but the leap in performance of the Stillen car over the already quick stock offering is staggering. Sure, it's extreme – it's not quite the ticket for nipping down to the shops – but a perfect weapon for towelling those Euros at track days.

Add Millen's dramatic driving style to the orange Stillen car, and Targa crowds should have plenty to cheer about this year. **EC**



**STILLEN  
NISSAN GT-R**

PERFORMANCE	
0-100 km/h	3.90s
80-120 km/h TED*	1.75s (50m)
100-0km/h	34.65m
ENGINE	
Capacity (cc)	3799 cc
Format	V6/twin turbo/longitudinal
Max power	462 kW (claimed)
Specific output	121.6 kW/L
Weight-to-power	3.44 kg/kW
TRANSMISSION	
Gearbox	6-speed/twin-clutch
Drivetrain	AWD
SUSPENSION	
front	Mac strut/adjustable Penske dampers/Stillen sway bar
rear	multilink/adjustable Penske dampers/Stillen sway bar
BRAKES	
front	ventilated cross-drilled carbon ceramic disc (400mm)
rear	ventilated cross-drilled carbon ceramic disc (400mm)
Stability systems	ABS/EBD/ESP/TC
WHEELS & TYRES	
Size	f- 255/40ZR20 r- 285/35ZR20
Tyres	Bridgestone RE070R
DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase	2780 mm
Length/Width/Height	4675 mm/1895 mm/1360 mm
Track	1590 mm/1600 mm
Drag coefficient	n.a.
Fuel capacity	74 litres
Luggage capacity	315 litres
WEIGHT	
With full tank	1590 kg

