

### ● build stage: **Introduction**

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#### Ever had the itch to own a 510? Most

Nissan owners have had it at one time or another. Those who have succumbed to the urge to



**FIGURE 1:** Project 510 is resurrected from a local gravel pit after sitting since 1978.

own a “Dime” or “Bluebird” know the joys and heartbreaks of 510 ownership. They also know that 510s are addictive, and much like crack, they will become the only thing you think about. In addition to costing a hell of a lot of money, you will crave driving your 510 instead of listening to your wife or playing with your kids. You will spend bleary-eyed hours trolling the mailing lists and billboards, eBay and Craigslist, searching for another idea, another part. 510 owners are the automotive equivalent of crackheads. The worst part of it: There is no cure.

I should know, I’ve owned 510s on and off for the last 20 years. I rode in my first one in 1977, a nice beige 2-door with a black racing stripe. I was seven at the time, and it was the first car I had ever ridden in with a racing stripe. I was hooked. I bought my first 510, a red ‘72 2-door, with a racing stripe, just before my 18th birthday. My life has been a series of 510s since then: six total, three of which I still own.

For *Nissan Sport’s* first Project 510, I’ve chosen a nice oxidized ‘69 2-door. I found this car in a gravel pit several years ago, but only purchased it from the previous owner just last year [Figure 1]. The car belonged to the PO’s dear departed mom, Granny L, who passed away in the late ‘70s. The last valid tag on this car was dated 1978, and it hadn’t moved since.

This car is shockingly stock. No aftermarket floor mats, no aftermarket radio [Figure 2]. In

fact, Granny wasn’t much into music as the radio delete panel and the rubber plug for the antenna are still in place. It also still has the four original bias ply tires that came with the car. The only stock items that seem to be missing are the four “dog dish” hubcaps.

Like most “barn finds,” this car came with a collection of trunk treasures: a sleeve of ‘70s Wilson tennis balls, a quart can of Safeway 10W30, some vintage Turtlewax, and a set of bias ply snow tires. The glove box yielded a Spokane

Expo sticker, expired insurance forms, and a mileage log detailing a trip to New York and New Jersey, including road tolls. The big prize though came from under the front seat: a vintage tab of acid with the words “Don’t Bite” printed on it [Figure 3]. Hmmm Granny, is there something we should know? I guess even Grannies can have a wild side!

There are essentially three types of builds to consider when approaching a 510 project. You can go stock, which in Datsun circles means, As it was when it came from the dealer (including dealer options and period-correct parts). This is actually one of the more expensive options. Why? Because some stock 510 parts are rarer



**FIGURE 2:** The interior, as well as the rest of the vehicle, remains in factory stock form.

than hen’s teeth!

Next, you can go “RestoRod,” which includes added parts and upgrades. An engine swap and brake upgrades are the two big basic moves. This is generally the cheapest option as you can swap in readily available parts from

newer Nissans, including more powerful engines. Most 510s out there fall into the RestoRod category.

Last but not least, you can go “Street Rod,” creating a mean Honda-killing machine that can be legally run on the street. There are some amazing 510s in this category. Got 50K to dump into a Dime? It’s been done more than a few times. I told you 510s were like crack! Better get used to sleeping in your garage and eating Kraft Mac & Cheese.

So, how do you decide which way to go? The condition of your project car can often make the decision for you. 510s tend to have rust below the door line. Draw a line across the body at the bottom of door level, and that’s where you will have 90 percent of your rust issues. A rusty floor pan or two is no big deal (nor is a rocker panel or wheel arch), but any combination of two or more of these conditions and you might want to move on and look for a better project car. The more rust, the more money you will spend on a restoration, and the less you can spend on new or performance parts.

What direction will I take? Since finding a true stock 510 to build from is a rarity these



**FIGURE 3:** Granny’s psychedelic secret and some other “trunk treasures.”

days, I have decided that *Nissan Sport’s* Project 510 is going to get a full stock restoration. Stay tuned as we document the teardown and bodywork of Project 510.

## ● build stage: **Paint and body**

Build: **Merlin Blackwell**, associate editor

**I could have titled this: “The good, the bad and the ugly,”** but it was really about spending a fistful (or wheelbarrow full) of dollars on paint and body work. To refresh your memory, my “barn find” is a 69 510 “Granny”-owned car. Dead stock, two door, hadn’t moved since 1978 and was a seemingly solid find. Little did I know...

Since this was to be a full restoration, the first thing I did was a full disassembly to the bare shell. This involved two days of broken bolts, lots of boxes and baggies, much blood loss and



plenty of swearing. And I drank beer; a fair amount of beer. I left the front struts, steering, and rear suspension in place so it could be rolled to the body shop, but other than that – Granny was buck naked and ready to party with the guys at Big Time Motors. Big Time is run by Tyson Hartmann. Tyson is a Datsun guy; his revolving fleet of Nissan products includes a B210, a 240SX and a custom “couped” two-door 510. Big Time does restorations, not modern replace-and-repaint bodywork like most chain body shops. Tyson and his man Doug had just finished the restoration of another 510, a butter yellow ‘68 four door. I’d watched this project and decided that Tyson’s attention to detail was what I wanted for my 510. A half-day trailer ride later and Granny was tucked into the shop at Big Time. I knew Granny had a few issues, so I actually brought along some spare panels, including a complete floor pan. Tyson gave Granny a thorough inspection and we discussed my budget. I wanted this car done right, so I knew it was going to go above \$10K with paint. I knew the floor pans up front and the bottoms of the quarter panels needed work, but Tyson was also worried about the rockers and the frame rail under

the battery. He can read rust, and Granny was giving him doubts.

“Are you sure you want to do this car? I think it has some hidden issues.” I was a little stunned. I don’t live in the dry belt, so this 510 was the straightest, cleanest stock two door I’d come across in years. What could be that wrong with it? “Of course I want to do this car,” I said. So what if Tyson might have to spend a few more hours on metal work than most jobs—how hard could that be? I handed Tyson a bucket of money and cheerily skipped back off to LaLa

land; dreams of a fresh red 510 dancing in my soft little stupid head.

A week later Tyson called. “We need to talk.” He said it in that tone—you know the one—the

one you hear just before your girlfriend dumps you, or the doctor tells you something bad. “I’ve just finished media blasting your car and need to replace a lot of metal. It’s not going to be cheap. I can stop now if you want”. Okay? So how bad could it be?

“Both rockers, that front rail and the whole floor pan need replacing, plus some patch panels on the rear quarters.” Crap. How could I have missed this? Best as we can figure, water had gotten past the cracked weather-stripping and Granny had steamed and rusted herself from the inside out. Rocker panels that were smooth and

clean metal on the outside looked like the surface of Mars on the inside: red, cratered and dusty. It wasn’t until the media blasting had removed all the paint that some of the soft metal started to show up. So the debate in my head was: Do I pay Tyson the money to fix it right, or do I find another two door and risk finding the very same issues? I hate reality checks almost as much as I hate giving up on something. This 510 is 40 years old, a survivor, ancient compared to the current generations of cars that go into the shredder after little more than a decade on the road. Could I send another 510 to the crusher? Hell no! Out came another large bucket of money. “Do it, Tyson,” I said, but I might as well have said, Damn the torpedoes!

Tyson sent nearly daily updates as he welded in the new floor pan and frame rail. Every nook and cranny was touched. The trunk and door skins were peeled back, etched, and resealed with a host of PPG products. After the body was primed, filled, blocked, and sanded several times and then finished with two coats of PPG single-stage paint (in Datsun stock 814 red), it was followed by two coats mixed 50/50 with clearcoat. To date, Granny has nearly 500 hours of blasting, sanding, hammering, welding, more sanding, filler, primer, undercoating, paint, and some serious polishing work into her. She is (cough) somewhat over budget, but she’s a hot old broad. I can’t wait to take her out. Next time we’ll tackle suspension, brakes, and some nice VTO Classic 4s.

