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## G WIZARDRY

INFINITI BEATS THE SOPHOMORE JINX

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**T**HE ORIGINAL G35 sedan, a 2003 model, was a big playmaker for Infiniti. Sharing the rear-wheel-drive FM platform and VQ35 V6 with the two-seat Nissan 350Z, it cloaked a sports car attitude in luxury sedan dress. This rwd addition to a segment where Infiniti previously had only the fwd Maxima-based I35 launched the struggling luxury division into contention and contributed to the overall Nissan turnaround.

G models now account for one-third of Infiniti sales. When the second-generation sedan launches in November, Infiniti says the car will carry the theme “Beyond Machine.” We’ll skip the “to Infiniti and beyond” jokes to simply note the target vehicle for everyone in this market segment is still the one calling itself the “ultimate driving machine.” With

nowhere to go beyond “ultimate,” what can it mean to go beyond machine? We’re not sure it’s much more than marketing mumbo jumbo, but we’ve now driven the car, so let’s start with the machine.

The 2007 G is more of a redesign than it is an all-new car. The FM (front-mid-engine) platform runs on the same 112.2-inch wheelbase, and the fourth-generation VQ35 is revamped but in essence the same engine.

That the new G looks similar to the original is no great surprise—the proportions are pretty much locked in. But designers have done a good job distinguishing the new car.

A-pillars are pushed back for more rake to the windshield, helping to yield a Cd of 0.29 and lowering the roof 0.5 inch. There’s another half-inch of overall length, while the track is up just

less than one inch front and rear, and the car gains only 48 pounds despite many additional standard features.

Surfacing is reworked to more strongly emphasize the car is rwd, a message also conveyed by aggressive wheel flares—the new model is 0.9 inch wider, entirely attributable to the flares. Along with the front fenders, the hood, grille and headlights especially look fresh, with a wave form to the hood and tighter fits around the headlights. The grille elements are twisted in a manner meant to resemble Japanese swords.

A little national character also appears inside, where the aluminum trim has a surface inspired by the texture of washi paper, which is made from the bark of shrubs. The alternative is handsome rosewood trim.

Underneath, the hardware is familiar but improved. Start with

that engine, in which 80 percent of the major parts are new. There is variable valve timing on both intake and exhaust cams, increased airflow, a ladder-frame main-bearing carrier and improved cooling. A lot of this work is aimed at smoothing the engine’s high-rpm performance as well as increasing its output.

It is SAE-rated at 306 hp at 6800 rpm and 268 lb-ft at 4800 rpm. Redline moves up to 7600 rpm. The power peak is almost 50 hp above that of the BMW 330i and identical to the Lexus IS 350’s. Infiniti asserts its ram-air intake system contributes another 3 hp, but the SAE standards don’t factor in that effect. The torque curve is tuned to deliver a sense of swelling acceleration, which Infiniti likens to a superbike’s power delivery. Although the power-to-weight ratio isn’t in the same league, when you really get

on it the comparison seems apt.

Transmissions offered are a six-speed manual or a five-speed automatic with one of the better manual-shift modes out there, operated via magnesium paddles behind the steering wheel.

Chassis revisions include a lot of work on tuning the resonance frequencies on each component, with 16 percent more spot welds and three times as much laser seam welding to hold it all together. Chassis stiffness is up 40 percent, Infiniti says, allowing the suspension engineers more latitude in tuning. The suspension elements

felt sharper than in Sport model cars that lacked the rear-steer feature, but the shock absorbers are also firmer with 4WAS, so it is hard to say whether this was due to damping or the rear-steer. Infiniti has since decided to use these stiffer shocks in other Sport models.

Power is far more than ample both on the road and on the race-track, where the G35 Sport felt more at home than did either the 330i or the IS provided for comparison. One clear advantage for the G35 over the BMW or the Lexus was found in Lime Rock's

Another on-track advantage was on the backside, No Name Straight, where both the German and Japanese competition found their six-speed automatics shifting up just when you didn't want that, mere feet before the liftoff point. The Infiniti's five-speed automatic may just have better gearing for the course, but its manual mode allows the driver to hold a gear right up to the rev limiter, not trying to out-think the driver.

This is appreciated, too, on the open road. We'd still prefer the manual transmission (though one

seat; the G35x equipped with all-wheel drive; and the Sport offered in both the five-speed automatic and six-speed manual versions.

Along with the limited-slip differential, opting for Sport gets you specific suspension tuning, upgraded front brake calipers, 18-inch wheels and summer performance tires, sport seats with thigh extensions and power torso bolsters, a grippier steering wheel, aluminum pedals and—depending on which transmission you choose—either paddle shifters for the automatic or a hand parking brake for the manual. 4WAS is offered only on the Sport.

Beyond the machine, the G35 offers an array of luxury features including a navigation system with XM NavTraffic for traffic updates along your chosen course, and voice recognition. All cars have the seven-inch dashboard touch screen, but opt for navigation and you will also find a 9.5 gigabyte hard drive built into the system—you can rip music CDs to the hard drive.

Audiophiles may choose the Bose "Studio on Wheels," which delivers true two-channel stereo sound, rather than opting for surround sound. There are three-way speakers built into each front door, which were designed specifically around them. In the parking lot, it truly simulates live performance—on the road, we left it off to listen to the engine sing.

Other options include adaptive front lighting (it turns with the steering), intelligent cruise control with "preview braking" (it pressurizes the hydraulic system, but doesn't apply the four-wheel discs until the driver hits the pedal), rearview monitor, and the usual sunroof, power tilt/telescoping steering column, heated seats, etc.

Second-generation cars sometimes compromise the integrity of the original vision. With the Sport models at least, Infiniti appears to beat the sophomore jinx, offering more of what made the original G35 special without trying to make it all things to all people. ■



#### 2007 INFINITI G35 SEDAN

**ON SALE:** November **BASE PRICE:** \$32,800 (est.) **POWERTRAIN:** 3.5-liter, 306-hp, 268-lb-ft V6; rwd, six-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT:** 3497 lbs **0 TO 60 MPH:** 5.6 seconds (est.) **FUEL MILEAGE (EPA COMBINED):** 21.62 mpg



are stronger, and the tuning is stiffer overall. On the road the car feels both smoother and more alive, with enhanced steering feel—it's no great landmark in steering feel, but it's not bad.

The preproduction cars we drove included one equipped with the optional active rear steering (4WAS, for four-wheel active steer). Turn-in in this car

first turn, a long sweeper called Big Bend. Where the Lexus felt soft and floppy, like a bigger luxury sedan, and the BMW declined to take a set and instead leaned over, released, and leaned again, the G35 buckled down and hustled through, assisted on exit by the Sport model's standard viscous limited-slip differential.

Track-day drivers take note:

we drove had a pronounced gear whine in the lower rpm ranges), but Infiniti's is an automatic that an enthusiast can live with.

Five G models are offered, as Infiniti aims to stretch the car's appeal across a broader range of customers. Beyond the base G35 is the Journey with in-dash CD changer, dual climate control and eight-way power passenger

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