

2007 NEW CARS



in? We look forward to finding out.

The power feeds through a six-speed manual gearbox that's the personification of precise engagement—it makes BMW's 3-series manual transmissions seem rubbery—to a limited-slip rear end and thence to the pavement via a set of 245/45-18 Bridgestone Potenza RE050A tires.

The 18-inch shoes (225/50-18 front)—the base rubber is 17-inch all-seasons—deliver grip that's a little better than the previous G35 managed: 0.87 g versus 0.85, but neither number is impressive by the standards of this class. What is impressive is the G35's nifty footwork on a set of switchbacks or that secret stretch of country road where you just *know* your transit times are world-class.

This honey can dance as fast as you can pedal, without a misstep and without punishing its partner in the ride department. Besides its more aggressive tires, the Sport 6MT employs firmer rear dampers and a harder steering-gear bushing. It's a setup that delivers Bimmer-esque compliance, and if the 3-series still holds an edge in this area, the distinctions have become paper thin.

G35 Sport models also have heftier brakes—bigger rotors, beefier single-piston calipers—that pay off in improved performance. The brake pedal felt a little long and a tad squishy, but our test car needed only 160 feet to stop from 70 mph, a number that would have been best in test in that October comparo.

Although the sheetmetal is all-new, Infiniti didn't take any big chances with the G35's second-gen styling. The outer blades of the grille are canted forward, the HID bi-xenon headlights are new, the hood has more contour, there's a new character crease down the sides, and the rear roofline is a little faster, with a little more down slope that takes a small bite out of rear-seat headroom. The wheelbase is unchanged at 112.2 inches, still the longest among



the leaders in this class. However, overall length has stretched by a half-inch, width increases by 0.8 inch, and at 59.8 inches front and rear, the track has expanded by 0.7 and 0.5 inch, respectively. The roofline, meanwhile, is down by a half-inch.

The look that emerges is a little more tightly wrapped and athletic, particularly going away, but it takes a practiced eye to perceive its newness.

The interior is a different story. Upgraded materials, a superb new Bose audio option, an attractive and highly legible new instrument package, nicely placed switches with an exceptionally positive operational feel, and a sporty steering wheel with hand-stitched leather all lend an upscale feel that wasn't really part of the first-generation G35. We're not unanimously seduced by the aluminum interior trim—to some, at least, the optional straight-grain rosewood veneer might be preferable—and the front buckets aren't quite in the BMW league in lateral support. On the other hand, there's lots of power adjustability, there's plenty of room front and rear—thanks to that long wheelbase—and interior noise is down in most operating modes, save for wide-open throttle.

Money: We don't know. As usual, Infiniti sources will say only that they expect the new G to maintain a "highly competitive" price position. The '06 G35 started at \$31,850. We estimate the broadened '07

COUNTERPOINT

ROBIN WARNER

Infiniti's G35 line was always a weird anomaly to me. The coupe and the sedan were both great to drive, but the coupe had graceful, flowing lines that made it look elegant and sporty, and the sedan looked portly and had an awkward, sloped rear end. Perhaps Carlos Ghosn whipped the design team into shape, because this new car is stunning. The revised front end looks tight and sporty, and the sloppy rear-end slope is replaced with more properly proportioned architecture. BMW's superbly balanced 3-series is still the benchmark dynamically, but the new G35 is much nicer to look at.

MARK GILLIES

BMW casts a long shadow over every contender in the near-luxury segment. But the G35 now makes a fine case for itself against the 3-series, especially as it is likely to be cheaper. The G35 also brings up another comparison, to wit: Why on earth would one buy a Lexus IS350? The Lexus isn't appreciably quicker, doesn't look as good, and is a fairly anodyne driving experience, whereas the G35 is a very soulful machine. The Lexus has a more beautifully wrought interior than the G35's (much improved) cabin, but that's about its only advantage. In short, Infiniti does a much better job of being the Japanese luxury brand that makes cars we want to drive.

MIKE DUSHANE

The original G35, for 2003, was a hit because it offered lots of power and torque in a stylish package for thousands less than competitors. It's obvious Infiniti didn't want to mess up the formula. The new G looks a lot like the old, and much of the running gear carries over. On the road, it's still buttoned down enough to hustle. Unfortunately, the previous car's lack of refinement also persists. The interior is still comprised of too many ill-fitting plastic pieces. On the highway, there's a lot of noise, and small pavement imperfections unsettle the ride. The current BMW 3-series represents a quantum leap forward from its predecessor. This G35 doesn't. A bargain? Yes, but you get what you pay for.

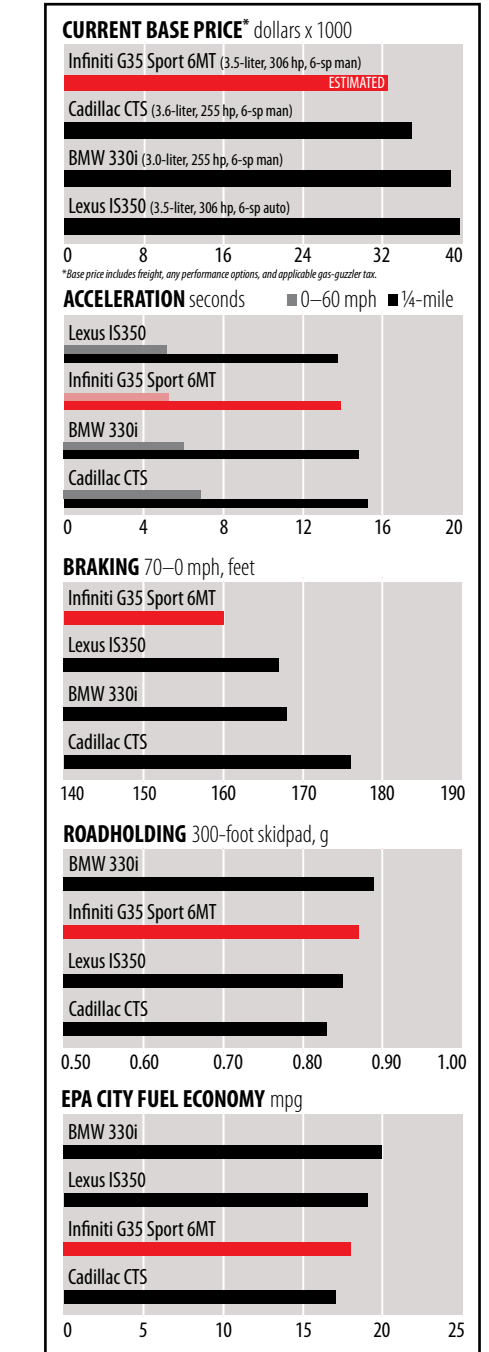
range—G35, G35 Journey, G35x AWD, G35 Sport, G35 Sport 6MT—will start at about \$32,500 and that our test car would retail for about \$36,000, right about where 330i pricing starts.

It never gets any cheaper. But if our estimates are anywhere close to accurate, the G35 will still be one of the best buys in its class. Can best in class be far away? We smell another comparo brewing.

...THE REST OF THE LINEUP

FX35/45: After a midyear freshening in 2006, the FX gets iPod connectivity for 2007.

Unchanged: G35 coupe, M35/45, Q45, QX56.



INFINITI G35 SPORT 6MT SEDAN

Vehicle type: front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door sedan

Estimated price as tested: \$36,000

Estimated base price: \$32,500

Options on test car: Premium package (includes sunroof, 10-speaker sound system, and heated front seats)

Major standard accessories: power windows, seats, and locks; remote locking; A/C; cruise control; tilting and telescoping steering wheel; rear defroster

Sound system: Bose AM-FM radio/CD changer, 10 speakers

ENGINE

Type: V-6, aluminum block and heads
 Bore x stroke: 3.76 x 3.20 in, 95.5 x 81.4mm
 Displacement: 213 cu in, 3498cc
 Compression ratio: 10.6:1
 Fuel-delivery system: port injection
 Valve gear: chain-driven double overhead cams, 4 valves per cylinder, hydraulic lifters, variable intake- and exhaust-valve timing

Power (SAE net): 306 bhp @ 6800 rpm
 Torque (SAE net): 268 lb-ft @ 4800 rpm
 Redline: 7600 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission: 6-speed manual
 Final-drive ratio: 3.69:1, limited slip
 Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max test speed
 I 3.79 5.5 42 mph (7600 rpm)
 II 2.32 9.0 68 mph (7600 rpm)
 III 1.62 12.9 98 mph (7600 rpm)
 IV 1.27 16.4 125 mph (7600 rpm)
 V 1.00 20.8 158 mph (7590 rpm)
 VI 0.79 26.4 158 mph (6000 rpm)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase: 112.2 in
 Track, front/rear: 59.8/59.8 in
 Length/width/height: 187.0/69.8/57.2 in
 Ground clearance: 5.3 in
 Drag area, Cd (0.29) x frontal area (25.2 sq ft, est): 7.3 sq ft
 Curb weight: 3583 lb
 Weight distribution, F/R: 53.3/46.7%
 Curb weight per horsepower: 11.7 lb
 Fuel capacity: 20.0 gal

CHASSIS/BODY

Type: unit construction
 Body material: welded steel stampings

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat: 55 cu ft
 rear seat: 41 cu ft
 trunk: 14 cu ft
 Front-seat adjustments: fore-and-aft, seatback angle, front height, rear height, thigh support; driver only: lumbar support, upper and lower side bolsters
 Restraint systems, front: manual 3-point belts; driver and passenger front, side, and curtain airbags
 rear: manual 3-point belts, curtain airbags

SUSPENSION

Front: independent, unequal-length control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar
 Rear: independent; 1 control arm, 1 lateral link, 1 trailing link, and 1 toe-control link per side; coil springs; anti-roll bar

STEERING

Type: rack-and-pinion with variable hydraulic power assist
 Steering ratio: 16.4:1
 Turns lock-to-lock: 3.1
 Turning circle curb-to-curb: 35.4 ft

BRAKES

Type: hydraulic with vacuum power assist, anti-lock control, and electronic panic assist
 Front: 13.0 x 1.3-in vented disc
 Rear: 13.0 x 0.6-in vented disc

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size: F: 7.5 x 18 in, R: 8.5 x 18 in
 Wheel type: cast aluminum
 Tires: Bridgestone Potenza RE050A; F: 225/50R-18 95W, R: 245/45R-18 96W
 Test inflation pressures, F/R: 33/33 psi
 Spare: high-pressure compact

C/D TEST RESULTS

Acceleration	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	2.0
40 mph	2.8
50 mph	4.0
60 mph	5.2
70 mph	6.9
80 mph	8.6
90 mph	10.5
100 mph	13.1
110 mph	15.8
120 mph	19.0
130 mph	23.8
140 mph	30.2
150 mph	38.2
Street start, 5-60 mph	5.8
Top-gear acceleration, 30-50 mph	8.7
50-70 mph	7.8
Standing 1/4-mile	13.9 sec @ 103 mph
Top speed (governor limited)	158 mph

BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup: 160 ft

HANDLING

Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad: 0.87 g
 Understeer: minimal/moderate/excessive

FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city driving: 18 mpg
 EPA highway driving: 25 mpg
 C/D-observed: 17 mpg

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle: 41 dBA
 Full-throttle acceleration: 79 dBA
 70-mph cruising: 67 dBA



ROAD TEST G35 SPORT 6MT SEDAN

A swell sequel to a first act that was very strong.

BY TONY SWAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK SAY

It's no secret that creating a new car whose visual and visceral appeals hit enough buyer sweet spots to make it a winner is chapter one in the great book of designer challenges. Not so well known, though, is chapter two: the follow-up. When the debutante gets rave reviews, whaddya do for the encore in four years? A major makeover? Or just the automotive equivalent of a little more eye shadow and a few sequins.

BMW has faced this challenge with its 3-series sedans for decades, responding each time with a cautious evolutionary styling update augmented by significant engineering improvements. It's an approach that obviously works—for BMW. The 3-series is the benchmark in the entry luxury-sports-sedan segment, with 15 consecutive appearances on the *Car and Driver* 10Best

Cars list to underscore its preeminence.

But can this policy work for a newcomer? Has the second-gen G35 got the chops to keep pace with the fifth-gen Bimmer? The short answer is a definite maybe.

History: The G35 was an unknown quantity when it made its appearance in mid-2002 as an '03 model—an eager rear-drive sports sedan replacing the I35, a badge-job version of the front-drive Nissan Maxima. Suddenly, Infiniti was a real contender in a game that has belonged almost exclusively to players from Germany, particularly those hailing from Bavaria. The real exclamation point came when a G35 prevailed in a seven-car sports-sedan shootout that included—*ta-da!*—a BMW ["\$35,000 Sports Sedans," *C/D*, March 2004]. Okay, the deck was stacked slightly

in the G35's favor. To keep the playing field level by price, the BMW was a 325i rather than a 330i, thus giving away 76 horses to its Asian assailant. But never mind. How many other Japanese sedans have topped a BMW 3-series sedan in *C/D* comparos over the past 20 years? Clue: zero.

The 3-series reasserted its primacy in a "\$35,000 Sports Sedans" rematch that included a 2006 Lexus IS350 [*C/D*, October 2005], and we described the G35 as "aging gracefully." How quickly new becomes not-so-new in the car biz. But more to the point, we think it likely the updated G would have given the 330i a much stronger run for first place. Here's why.

Leaving the cautious styling update aside for the moment, this is a distinctly more capable G35 than the original:

quicker straight ahead, quicker on its feet, with a new variable-assist rack-and-pinion steering system that tells the driver more about what the front tires are doing than did the previous setup. Infiniti also offers a new active-steering option that's touted as a response enhancer, but it wasn't present on our test car, and in any case, we wonder whether it's worth the extra money—\$1200, at a guess—or the added weight—about 25 pounds.

Speaking of weight, like almost all new cars, the G35 scales in a little heavier than the previous edition. Infiniti says 48 pounds and lists curb weight at 3532. In our comparo a year ago, the G35 weighed 3520, and this similarly equipped '07 version ran our needle up to 3583. Increased mass is never a good thing—you probably

notice that when you step on the scales at home—but in this case there are mitigating factors. For one, the updated FM architecture, shared with the Nissan 350Z and Infiniti FX45, is 40 percent stiffer, according to Infiniti, due in part to more extensive spot and seam welding in the unibody.

For another, there's more thrust from the car's 3.5-liter V-6 engine, the fourth generation of Nissan's VQ series. Although the bore and stroke specs of this oversquare design are unchanged, Infiniti says the engine is 80 percent new, with a beefier bottom end, variable cam timing on the intake and exhaust valves (the previous engine was intake side only), reduced exhaust back pressure, a slightly higher compression ratio (10.6:1 versus 10.3), a higher redline (7600 rpm versus 7000),

THE VERDICT

Highs: Ample thrust, telepathic steering, world-class gearbox, fancy footwork.

Lows: Long brake pedal, newness difficult to see at a glance, peculiar aluminum interior trim.

The Verdict: If you don't need BMW cachet, this ride has everything else.



and improved coolant flow—among other tweaks. It all adds up to 306 horsepower at 6800 rpm and 268 pound-feet of torque at 4800 rpm.

The previous engine carried a 2006 rating of 298 horsepower and 260 pound-feet, so at a glance, this doesn't look like much of an increase, particularly with a corresponding gain at the scales. However, the old power numbers were published before the Society of Automotive Engineers instituted its new and more stringent rating system, which means the output disparity between old and new is actually bigger. In addition, Infiniti notes that the new engine's breathing is enhanced by a ram effect through the dual air-intake system, to the tune of three more ponies at 60 mph.

Infiniti calls this effect, and the car's all-around acceleration characteristics, "swell," in the sense of a wave gathering power as it moves along. Uh-huh. We took our test car to the track, where it hunkered down and dashed to 60 mph in 5.2 seconds, covering the quarter-mile in 13.9 seconds at



103. Hmm, that is swell, and considerably quicker than the last G35 we tested (0 to 60 in 5.9 seconds and the quarter in 14.6 at 98 mph) as well as just a blink behind the IS350. More impressive still, our G35 tester went to the track with fewer than 250 miles on the odo. That's like putting an Olympic sprinter in the starting blocks in his street clothes. What'll it do with a proper break-