

AN INFINITE NUMBER OF INFINITIS

WELL, ALL OF THEM ALL AT ONCE, ANYWAY...

JOE SAGE



Anything worth doing is worth doing right. Infiniti has several major new introductions in the pipeline, along with some important refreshing of some of their other vehicles, so—to do it right—we flew to northern California to see and drive the whole lineup.

Driving opportunities would include the new 2011 Infiniti IPL G Coupe, the first representative of the brand's new Infiniti Performance Line™. The Infiniti G lineup has been expanded at both ends, from the new Infiniti G25 Sedan—which opens the door of the Infiniti brand to more early adopters—to the first-ever G Coupe AWD Sport, a combination we've been anticipating since the first G Coupe. The IPL G Coupe and G25 Sedan had debuted at the Pebble Beach Concours in August. The G line was also represented by the retractable hardtop Infiniti G Convertible. The 2011 Infiniti EX has been refreshed with a 7-speed automatic. Also on hand were the 2011 Infiniti M and QX, both of which had completely new models introduced earlier this year, plus the Infiniti FX.

Welcome to the candy store.

INFINITI G COUPE AWD SPORT

For starters, the Infiniti G lineup is originally kin to the Nissan Skyline in Japan, basis of the all-out Nissan GT-R sports car. Nice credentials. It also shares its platform with the 350Z (and the Infiniti FX). When the third-gen G Sedan was introduced, including a G35x all-wheel-drive model, we wished for an AWD G Coupe, which arrived within a couple of years. With the Sport Package on the 2011 G37 Coupe AWD, we find our favorite feature—a manual transmission (6-speed)—along with other upgrades: a revised front, with fog lights moved to the lower fascia, new 18- and 19-inch aluminum-alloy wheels, two new exterior colors, and navigation standard. The G37 Coupe AWD Sport 6MT was on static display in Napa, not quite ready for driving. It is due on the roads and at dealers in November.

INFINITI G CONVERTIBLE

The first Infiniti we grabbed for a drive was the new G37 Convertible. The Limited Edition has a special exterior and interior, Navigation Package (now standard on the G37 Convertible Sport 6MT, though ours was a non-Sport and automatic), and as with the other G models a revised front fascia, new wheels and two new exterior colors. It was still early morning, foggy and cold for an Arizonan, so we started with the retractable hardtop up. Roads in Napa Wine Country are beautiful, hilly, curvy two-lanes, and the car has a nice, firm suspension, though it wasn't always as flat on corners as its firmness might have indicated. The sun was starting to break through, so we pulled over to put the top down. At first it seemed to be going down very fast, with various parts transforming



Infiniti G Coupe AWD Sport

and relocating in the rear quarters, but the full process took a bit longer. We didn't time it, but we got it done and hit the road again, as another Infiniti from our group came up fast from behind. The suspension settled in, as did we, and we enjoyed the rest of the drive, curves and all, thoroughly, as we rolled past the vineyards and palms. We pulled over again and this time started the clock: top-up operation took about 30 seconds, starting with the windows up, ending with the windows down, basically just a top and trunk operation. Starting with the windows already down, it took about 28.5 seconds to put



Infiniti G Convertible (top up)



Infiniti G Convertible (top down)

the top back down. These are respectable times for a retractable hardtop, and the combination of closed cabin, open air and aerodynamic coupe form are tough to beat. We imagine the Sport model, with manual shift and perhaps one size larger wheels, would be unbeatable.

INFINITI IPL G COUPE

Infiniti has always emphasized performance (their rear-drive bias confirms that), but customers often ask their dealers what they have along the lines of the Audi S/RS, BMW M and Mercedes-Benz AMG offerings. Thus was

born the Infiniti Performance Line, and the IPL G Coupe is its first vehicle. The Infiniti Performance Line is more than an option list: it's an in-house division. IPL vehicles have integrated design and engineering upgrades (not add-ons, and not available to add on). This approach, in the case of the IPL G Coupe, delivers a car that might have cost upwards of \$70,000 for about \$50,000.

The IPL logo includes red for "sport and performance" and violet to represent the "Infiniti brand promise." Infiniti expects the IPL G Coupe to represent about five percent of its total G Coupe sales volume.

The 2011 IPL G Coupes (one manual, one automatic) were in great demand in Napa. We were about to take the G25 Sedan, when in pulled the IPL G Coupe with 6-speed manual, so we grabbed it. The previous driver had left the IPL's audio rockin', and we figured that was a good sign. This coupe was very responsive, and we loved the manual, of course. The gear ranges were such that we could downshift or not, through the variety of hills and curves on our route. We noted that the power curve overall felt a little flat, but also noted that, if anything, this gives you a feeling of no drama while actually providing plenty of drama with its sheer power. The IPL G Coupe had great handling, able to take anything we threw at it on these roads. A driver's car—very nice.

The IPL G Coupe's transmission generates a strong, high-tech sound from the gearing, and there is a deep but not overdone rumble from the exhaust. It's a very powerful precision effect overall, with no boy racer feel. Infiniti has worked hard on these acoustics, with a goal of establishing "the IPL sound."

On Henry Road, one of our favorite stretches out of three overall routes, we were able to really push performance—and loved it. With about a \$50,000 price cap and a well-balanced set of performance and comfort features, this is a reasonable, powerful, great ride. If you understand the philosophies of, say, an affordable Mustang GT versus a no-holds-barred Shelby, you'll appreciate the logic of the IPL G Coupe.

KEEP RIGHT >>

NAPA TRAVEL NOTES

Flying to the Bay Area means choosing among the San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose airports. Since this event was held in Napa County, to the north of the Bay, it would be either SFO or OAK. Given the traffic and lack of a through freeway in San Francisco, and the general location of our



destination in Napa, we went with Oakland. All are well served from Phoenix; in this case, we found the best schedule and fare on Southwest Airlines.

We had a midday event in Phoenix, which put us into the East Bay later than would have been ideal. But it's all free-



ways, most of the way. Turns out, that's not the good news. If you make this dash, especially around rush hour, allow a good two hours or more. One interesting oddity is that one stretch of this route uniquely requires three occupants for the HOV lanes. We've often wondered what would happen if HOV programs were really particularly successful: would they have to add more lanes? Well, here's our answer.



Our destination was The Carneros Inn, carefully chosen by Infiniti because it offered not only a full campus for all aspects of our event, but also offered it all with style, convenience and innovative design that allowed a surprising amount of privacy for guests, in a tight area. This property is also convenient to Infineon Raceway at Sears Point, so it's a great base

Travel Notes (cont'd) >>



Infiniti IPL G Coupe



INFINITI G25 SEDAN

The Infiniti G line has been a *Consumer Reports* top pick for years. In the most recent quarter, Infiniti G sales exceeded 10 percent of the entry luxury segment's total for the first time (a 25-percent jump from a longstanding position of about eight percent). There is news throughout the G lineup, as noted—upgrades to the G Coupe and Convertible, the new G Coupe AWD Sport, the IPL G Coupe—but the big news in G Sedans is a move downline, to a G25 entry-level model. Aware of significant sales of the Lexus IS 250 and BMW 328i, Infiniti is deliv-



Infiniti G25 Sedan



Infiniti M37 Sport

ering a solid sedan to a wider audience, while keeping its entry-level specifics to itself within the G lineup.

With all the exciting machinery available to us this day, the Infiniti folks were surprised to find the G25 Sedan was one of the most sought-after. Maybe it's the current economy, or maybe it's the eternal logic of value, but this solid new entry was very well received.

The G25 features a new 2.5-liter DOHC 24-valve V6, producing 218 horsepower and 187 lb-ft of torque, and a 7-speed automatic transmission. It shares its exterior, interior and chassis with the G37 Sedan, but its smaller

engine improves fuel economy. Icing on the cake? The G25 Sedan is available in both rear-wheel drive and Intelligent All-Wheel Drive. Estimated fuel mileage is 20/29 mpg (city/highway) or 19/27 with AWD.

G25 Sedan standard equipment includes leather-appointed seats, Shodo aluminum interior trim, 8-way driver's and 4-way front passenger's power seats, automatic climate control, six-speaker audio with satellite available, 17-inch aluminum-alloy wheels, HID Xenon headlights, 4-wheel ABS, Vehicle Dynamic Control (VDC) and traction control. The G25 Sedan Journey adds RearView Monitor, heated front seats, heated outside mirrors, auto on/off headlights, dual zone climate control and more.

Three models are offered: the G25 Sedan with a base price of \$30,950, the G25 Sedan Journey at \$32,350 and the G25x Sedan AWD at just \$33,950.

(The G37 has a 328-hp 3.7L 24-valve V6 and ranges from \$35,050 to \$39,450 for the G37 Sport 6MT.)

INFINITI M

The 2011 Infiniti M is available in two iterations, M37 and M56, each with rear-wheel drive or AWD. The V6 M has moved closer to the prior V8 M. The new M37 has a 330-hp 3.7-liter V6 with increased power and fuel economy compared to the previous M35's 3.5L V6. The M56 has an all-new 420-hp 5.6-liter V8 (up from the M45's 4.5L V8). Both engines feature the VVEL (Variable Valve Event & Lift) system and have a 7-speed automatic. A Sport Package on RWD models adds 4-

Wheel Active Steer (4WAS), sport-tuned suspension, upgraded brakes and 20-inch wheels and tires.

User-focused technologies include Infiniti Drive Mode Selector, a four-mode control of throttle and transmission mapping; Active Noise Control, masking engine harmonics for a quieter cabin; Blind Spot Warning (BSW) and Blind Spot Intervention™ (BSI), the latter helping a driver return toward the center of the lane of travel; Forest Air™ for natural "breeze-like" airflow; Eco Pedal, which provides driver feedback to encourage eco-driving behavior; and Active Trace

Control, which adjusts engine torque and the control of braking to enhance cornering performance. The 2011 M also has next-gen navigation, Bose® premium audio, and a range of electronic safety systems.

The M interior has leather-appointed seating, Japanese Ash or available silver powdered White Ash wood trim, and a power-sliding tinted glass moonroof.

With our test roads a great handling course, we chose the M37 over the M56, which would be fine but even better suited to the autobahn. With Infiniti's prompting, we wanted to try the Eco Pedal to experience how it "fights back" (which we can then override). We headed to a favorite shorter loop where we could run it repeatedly with different settings. We turned the knob to Sport, or so we thought, but we learned that the lettering turns with the knob, not the indicator, and we had switched to Eco. Wondered why it felt a bit doggy. So we proceeded with an Eco test, and sure enough, when we tried to give it a little gas, the gas pedal fought back. Coming into a sporty curve, we gave it a little gas for a performance sweep, and yes, it let us override it, as the Eco indicator changed from green to yellow. Next: Sport. Now we do whatever we want. A fourth setting is Snow, but we're in Napa, it's 71 degrees, and we skip this one.

We can see why they encouraged us to try Eco mode. It had sounded like something we might not want, and if we had might not turn on. But it didn't take any time at all to wish we had this on a couple of vehicles of our own that consume entirely too much fuel. It's not fun to nurse the behavior on those and think about their appetites, but the M is nursing the fuel and thinking about it for us. We're just having a pleasant ride. We've handed off some of the performance driving, but it has plenty of power, we're not overdoing it, and presumably we're not running our fuel mileage way down. And in reserve, if we want to punch it, it'll let us do that—without even leaving Eco mode, which is a very clever departure from most brands. Let's try that right now: coming into a corner, we give it gas. We didn't feel it fight back at all: it just let us do it. But we're here to feel it fight back. So we slow down and try again. Coming to a favorite turn, we give it gas, and it does fight back. We conclude that a jackrabbit start might be where it corrects you most, not when you're on the road and need quick power. That seems like a great algorithm: it doesn't keep you from accelerating purposefully, does keep you from being foolish, and probably adds up to significant savings. Is it a draconian system? No, it's no big compromise; at most, it's almost like getting a foot massage.



Infiniti FX

INFINITI FX

The 2011 Infiniti FX adds a power rear liftgate added as standard, new 20-inch aluminum-alloy wheels with P265/50R20 V-rated all-season tires on the FX50, replacing previous 21-inch wheels and tires (optionally available on FX35), and a new black lacquer interior trim standard on the FX50. We drove the FX35.

We had never quite taken to the FX's exterior styling. But as soon as we slid inside, we noted one nice look or finish after another. First were the quilted and ventilated leather seats, then the center stack, with a panel that

on. Feels great. The rear-view mirror is very large, which we appreciate, though it blocks the windshield a bit.

We moved the transmission to manumatic, as it was shifting up and down entirely too much on our little curvy roads, but then wished it would shift more. As an owner, we would study its curves and pattern, and surely find both approaches easy to master. We definitely look forward to driving the FX at greater length.

INFINITI EX

We ran out of time before we had a turn with the 2011 Infiniti EX, but its biggest news is a new standard 7-speed automatic, plus new standard 18-inch wheels and tires, standard Dual Zone climate control (previously on EX Journey models only), revised electroluminescent gauge illumination, Blind Spot Warning added to the Technology Package, a few more updates, and three new exterior colors.



Infiniti EX

INFINITI QX

We had driven the new 2011 Infiniti QX56 at its product launch a few months back (see our July/August issue) and found a powerful and comfortable large SUV with the panache of an executive jet, as Infiniti had promised. We could happily drive this one all week, but as we'd had a major drive in the Kentucky bluegrass hills, we had to pass on another chance. Too bad, that.

The big news on the QX for 2011 is comprehensive: all-new second-generation design, engineering and styling. Of note is its new 5.6-liter V8 engine, which provides both h25% more power



Infiniti QX56

and 14% better fuel economy than the previous V8.. bevels toward the window, a very classy control point. Then we noted the wood inserts in the door, more different brown leather in the split dash, and metal surfaces on the doors. Put it all together, and it's a very rich combination of textures, surfaces, shapes, colors, finishes, materials... all coming together really well. We can see how someone would really like the interior of the FX.

The cabin generated such a positive response, we no longer cared whether we liked the outside styling or not. The interior is a tour de force, and we are in total comfort. And no wonder: it turns out the cooled seats are already

and 14% better fuel economy than the previous V8..

INFINITI AND BEYOND

Infiniti and parent company Nissan are making great strides with their already strong lineups. The Nissan brand promises "innovation," and the upscale Infiniti brand promises "performance," which the 2011 lineup demonstrates they provide, in spades.

All the 2011 vehicles presented here, along with their siblings and model iterations, should be available at dealers as you read this, or within a couple of weeks. ■

NAPA TRAVEL (CONT'D)

for events held there, as well. But we weren't doing the speedway this time; we were hitting the open roads of Napa Wine Country.

The amount of space available for resort development in the middle of priceless vineyards is limited, and the demand is



huge. This has led to a very clever property. The density you see when looking on Google maps is belied on the ground. Spacious views abound, and each residence enjoys a high degree of privacy, with private decks visible only from their own units—so private, in fact, that they include



a personal outdoor shower, opening from the spacious indoor shower. The architects have taken a fairly tight space in each unit and dressed it in top-quality furnishings and finishes, giving each guest a very nice luxe cabin for the night.

Restaurants on the property include the Hilltop, where we have just two words of advice: sea bass. Our hosts, who had been there for several days already, had long



since settled on this as a favorite, but we had just taken a stab. The bed of white corn ragout under the bass alone is worth another visit.

For business needs, the facility also has a number of breakout rooms, where instead of the normal meeting/conference layout, we gathered in front of a roaring fireplace in comfortable leather chairs, to learn all the ins and outs of Infiniti's latest, from their development team. Comfy.—JS