

DRIVING IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOE SAGE

We are compelled to start by revisiting Infiniti's renaming scheme. It's easy to remember the cars are all Q-something now, and the SUVs and crossovers all QX-something (alphanumeric by tens, all). We could just learn all the new names on a clean-sheet basis, but whether Infiniti meant to throw out a decade or more of brand awareness or not, we find it useful to cross-compare. Here goes:

	.....NEW	.....OLD
CARS	.....Q50	.....new model*
	.....Q60	.....G (G25,35,37)
	.....Q70	.....M (M35,45,etc)
SUVs-CUVs	.....QX50	.....EX (EX25,35,etc)
	.....QX60	.....JX (JX35)
	.....QX70	.....FX (FX35,45,etc)
	.....QX80	.....QX (QX56)

*When we heard we'd be getting a test Q50 earlier this year, the renaming game almost made us not notice at first that it was an all-new model, something that would have made a bigger splash had it not come during the name changeover.

The Q names for cars are an homage to Infiniti Q cars of a decade or more prior—despite that name having been dropped

after 2006. The one SUV that was a QX all along, the QX56, receives a new number. Here, we meet the QX70, the former FX.

We had never been huge fans of the styling on the Infiniti FX. It had struck us as looking as though it were overinflated and then sat upon. Or perhaps looked like a "sensible shoe" (worn by necessity).

But we can now say that if we were luke-warm on the FX, we like the QX70, despite their being the same vehicle. This time, in this trim, even the styling grew on us.

The Sport package on this sample (which bore a "QX70S" badge, though its Monroney sticker identifies it as simply a "QX70") seems to be what made a huge difference. Included are much larger wheels (21-inch instead of standard 18-inch) in a dark finish—which may be all it takes for the body to look lean, ready to pounce from its haunches. This improves the overall relationship of body elements, now making its small greenhouse seem sleek and evocative of a four-door sports

coupe. Also included in that \$3550 package are a dark finish grille and other body trim, contrast stitching and a dark headliner inside, aluminum pedals and magnesium paddle shifters, and power bolsters on the driver's seat.

And driving makes all the difference.

Around town, we took to it almost immediately. As we first sat down, we had the usual couple of notations about minor annoyances with seat adjustments, touchscreen and mirrors, all things a full-time owner will soon find manageable. But as far as driving, the QX70 offers a nice fit and a nice feel. Turn the key and hit the road, and it's a great handler, with smooth power from its 325-hp V6; good visibility, despite its sleek shape and seemingly large D-pillar; and a solid command of the road, without feeling overly big.

The EPA ranks the QX70 as a small SUV (the same as a little Buick Encore), despite its interior volume of 102.5 cubic feet (close to that of a Jeep Grand Cherokee,

rated as a standard SUV, at 105.4 cu.ft.). Inside, the QX70 feels quite spacious, while the vehicle is very manageable, with steering that is easy, fast, flat and sure. We were able to perform boulevard U-turns seizing the center of three lanes, despite its 36.7-foot turning circle spec.

We took the Infiniti QX70 on a fairly long and very spirited drive on particularly winding and hilly two-lanes away from the Valley, where it may still look a bit like a beachball, but handles like muscle beach. The vehicle felt luxurious, tight and firm, while suspension was solid, capable and comfortable. The QX70 delivers exactly what you would expect from Nissan when they build a premium brand—solid, straightforward features and drive experience, transformed by a thorough and well-executed luxury overlay.

We found the seven-speed automatic smooth and well-spaced, but also enjoyed its rev-matching manual mode both around town and on the open road.

We didn't take the QX70 off-pavement, though with 7.36 inches of ground clearance, it should do quite well—if you're willing to risk rock chips on that beautiful Graphite Shadow paint job. Our example was a rear-driver; AWD adds just \$1450 to the cost (and about 112 pounds to the weight, either model coming in over two



tons), while dropping fuel mileage a point or two. Ours did include a snow mode, probably pretty effective for what its name implies, though we'd still opt for all-wheel drive even if headed instead to desert camping or river adventures.

Put it all together and for mid-40s base, or under 60 grand with all the upfitting that won us over, you have a luxury sport utility that can hold its own against some high-dollar Europeans, but at \$30-50,000 less. ■

SPECIFICATIONS (RWD)

ENGINE	.....3.7L longitudinal V6
TRANSMISSION	.....7-speed automatic
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD with snow mode
POWER/TORQUE	.....325 hp / 267 lb-ft
WHEELS	.....standard 18-in aluminum alloy
WEIGHT	.....(52/48 distrib) 4209 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	.....23.8 gal
MPG	.....17/24/19 (city/hwy/comb)

INCLUDED: Leather, heated 10-way driver's seat w 2x lumbar, HID xenon heads, fogs, one-touch power moonroof, dual zone climate/filter, rear heat/cool (console/below seats), Homelink, power liftgate, black lacquer interior trim, rear cam, 7" display, keyless entry/start, Bose 11-speaker audio, brake assist, EBF, ABS, dynamic and traction control, alarm and more.

BASE PRICE	.....\$45,850
TECH PACKAGE:	Intelligent cruise, lane depart warn/prevent, intelligent brake assist, forward collision warn, distance control, adaptive/auto-level heads, rain-sensing wipers, front pre-crash seatbelts.....2950
PREMIUM PACKAGE:	Hard drive nav, 8" touchscreen, voice recognition, NavTraffic/NavWeather, surround view, front/rear sonar, moving object detection, Bluetooth streaming audio, CD-DVD, dual memory seats, entry/exit assist for driver.....4330
SPORT PACKAGE:	21-inch 6-spoke dark finish wheels, aluminum pedals, dark finish front grille, roof rails, fog lamp surround, mirror housings, side air vents, lower side molding and trunk finishes, interior contrast stitching, dark headliner, heat/cool front seats, front sport seats with driver 4x power bolster, magnesium paddle shifters.....3550
ILLUMINATED KICK PLATES:	.....440
DESTINATION CHARGE:	.....995
TOTAL	.....\$58,085

