

IN THE GROOVE

by Joe Sage

It was easy to lose track of Infiniti's lineup evolution several years back, when all model names migrated to Q-numeric for sedans and coupes or QX-numeric for crossovers and SUVs. Since some current models are prior ones, renamed, but a couple are all new since then, we find ourselves still translating—equal parts easy and tricky in some cases. QX models have been direct rebadges of prior EX, FX, JX and in fact QX, other than QX30, an all-new vehicle since the new scheme kicked in. In the case of their cars, there is now only one related pair—the Q50 sedan and Q60 coupe.

There's something about the Q50 that always makes us think twice and doublecheck its lineage. There are many G-Series Infinitis still on the road

(the gen-one Q is now in its eighth year). We often found ourselves next to one, and when we did, the Q seemed smaller than the G. But they're the same size (though height is an inch or so less and legroom an inch or so more in the Q versus the G). To our eye, the G looks more midsize, the same-size Q more compact. In reality, they've both been classified compact or compact-executive over the years. (The retired M similarly seemed full-size, but was classified as midsize or midsize-executive.)

Whether G or Q in our market, this sedan-coupe group has been the Skyline in Japan for 13 generations—since 1957 (from Prince Motor Company at first, taken over by Nissan ten years later). It first came to the US in 2001 as the Infiniti G35.

You're likely familiar with Skyline as the forebear of Nissan's GT-R performance series, for years a highly sought-after unicorn here, righthand-drive, imported only rarely and innovatively. Skyline GT-R is familiar to any *Fast and Furious* franchise fan as the one most notably associated with the late Paul Walker's character. GT-R, once a Skyline series, became its own distinct model starting in 2007.

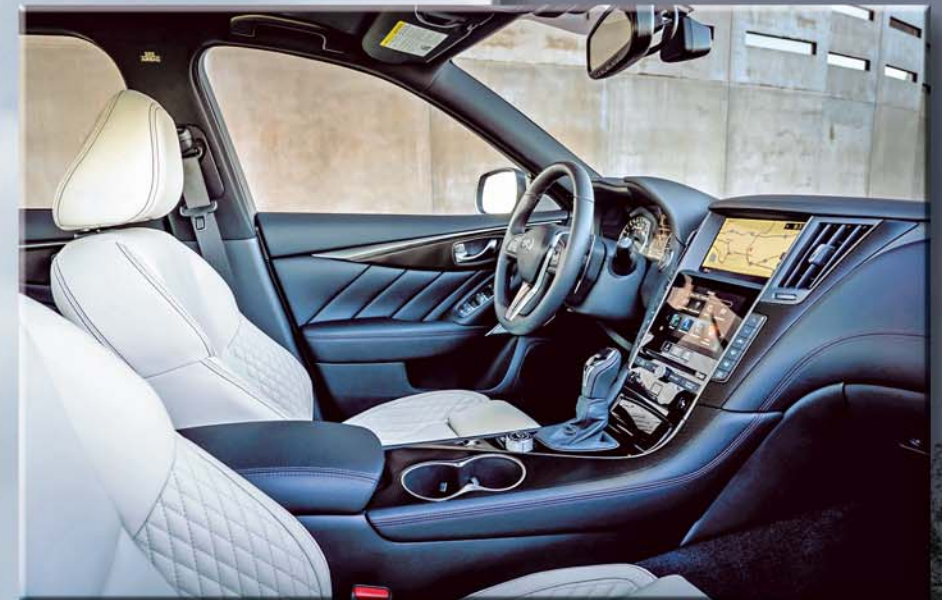
The significance of all this is that relativity and performance roots loomed large in the evolution of our perceptions during our week with the Q50. Size aside, we found ourselves making drive comparisons with the Nissan Z—also not surprising, as the earlier G37 coupe had often been thought of as an Infiniti Z of sorts, or the closest to such a thing. Yet its size is that of the Skyline—still closer to the now-distinct GT-R. Yet across the full range, the Infiniti Q50 is closer to the pricing of the Z line-

up (plus premium-luxury differential)—even in our top-trim Red Sport 400 build, in this scenario most comparable to the Nissan 370Z NISMO.

Put it all together, and here's what we're arguably driving: a four-door premium-luxury (automatic and AWD) Z-car cousin, and/or a GT-R cousin at half the price (even as a Red Sport 400).

We had started out finding this small sedan kind of unremarkable. Its sport-bolstered seats were tight, and its 400 horsepower somehow didn't feel like that. We didn't think much past using it as a daily driver. But we soon slipped into the groove, even around town, where—like a racing pony—it gave its best when pushed. We packed on the miles, running back and forth between east and west Valley during March auction week, highly favoring its sport mode (there's also sport-plus, if you prefer much more active shift blips).

As the week continued, we took it out onto the twisty, hilly desert two-lanes, and were now fully engaged. Its suspension (highly engineered and electronically controlled) and all-wheel-drive system are as sure-footed as the best AWD performance Europeans. A lot of what we like about the Q50's performance and handling are inherent in something we've admired about Infiniti since the



brand was born, their emphasis on rear-drive platforms, as in this one, also available that way.

By the time we were ready to head home from our final rural romp, we really didn't want to give it back. It turns out this top-performance Infiniti Q50, just like its cousins and forebears, had been in the groove all along. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....	3.0L twin-turbo 24v alum/alum V6
HP/TORQUE	400 hp / 350 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	(opt / RWD standard) AWD
TRANSMISSION	7-spd auto w sport mode and downshift rev-match
SUSPENSION	electronically controlled Digital Dynamic Suspension:
	F: indep dbl-wishbone w stblzr bar
	R: multi-link indep w stblzr bar
STEERING	rack electronic power steering (avail/Red Sport: direct adaptive steering)
BRAKES.....	power-assist vented
	F: 14.0x1.3 4-piston; R: 13.8x0.8 2-piston
WHEELS.....	(AWD) 19x9 alum alloy (note: staggered fitment on RWD)
TIRES	Dunlop 245/40R19 AS
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	189.6 / 112.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	(AWD) 37.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R).....	39.5 / 36.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	44.5 / 35.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	13.5 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	(AWD) 4.8 in
WEIGHT	3998 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION	57 / 43 %
FUEL CAPACITY	20.0 gal
MPG	19/26/22 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$57,750
PREMIUM PAINT: SLATE GRAY	695
CARBON FIBER PKG: rear decklid spoiler & outside mirror covers	1520
LIGHTING: Infiniti radiant ext welcome	465
LIGHTING: Infiniti radiant illum kick plates	485
REAR USB CHARGE PORTS	145
CARGO PKG: carpet trunk area protector, cargo net, first aid kit, shopping bag hook	270
DESTINATION CHARGE	1025
TOTAL	\$62,355

2021 INFINITI Q50 LINEUP

	3.0L twin-turbo V6	
Pure	300 hp	\$36,600
Luxe		41,700
Sensory		47,600
Red Sport	400 hp	55,750
Plus AWD on any		+\$2,000

