Infiniti G35x: aggressive excellence

by Mark_Maynard

A sport-tuned, all-wheel-drive sport sedan can be the best and worst of times.

The Infiniti G35x AWD S, for example, is fast, lithe and eager to show how well it can scream through corners. All-wheel drive gives the car substantial grip, which seems to enhance the suspension engineering. The ride is a sporting-firm ride, not jarring or harsh.

INFINITY G35X - All-wheel-drive sport sedans, such as the Infiniti G35X, raise the level of performance and are great in bad weather. But the driveline complexity adds weight, affects tire wear and lowers fuel economy. CNS Photo courtesy of Infinity. The caution for this type of sport sedan can be in winter driving, particularly if the owner does not switch to snow-gripping tires. And for drivers who won't use the car in snowy conditions, they're paying for that unused traction in more burned fuel because the driveline adds weight.

In terms of maintenance, there should not be any additional cost for the average driver, at least for the car's first owner, said Gordon Wangers, president of Automotive Marketing Consultants Inc. in Vista, Calif.

"When the vehicle goes out of warranty, that's when I'd be a little wary, as all-wheel-drive repairs can be very costly," Wangers said.

The S model test car was masculine in driving and in the interior design. The black surfaces, neatly stitched black leather and the Washi-finished aluminum trim (which looks etched and brushed) are handsome and serious.

Magnesium steering-wheel paddle shifters look like Klingon battle blades, and they set an aggressive tone with the metal-trimmed brake and accelerator pedals.

They're not just decoration because the acceleration is fierce and pleasurable. Flip a downshift with the steering wheel shift "blades" and the engine gives a rev-matching throttle blip. Nice.

But there's also some electronic lag to the throttle. In time I became accustomed to the slight disconnect between pressing the accelerator pedal and the engine jolt.

Fuel economy is 17 mpg city and 23 highway on 91 octane.

Sightlines front and rear are clear for drivers of most sizes. Doors open wide for comfortable adult access, but drivers who wear skirts may not appreciate the high sides of the well-bolstered front seats. Controls are intuitive.

The G35x's interior quality is better than the new Mercedes C300 Sport, which seems to be emulating the import sport sedan. But that's still not an excuse to cut corners.

The back seats are comfortable with substantial seat bottoms, but they have restricted foot room under the front seats. The center seat is a suggestion, compromised by the tall driveline tunnel and a high center seat position.

The G35x AWD S has a starting price of $34,815 and was $40,365 as tested. As equipped, all the option packages on the test car were desirable. The $2,300 premium package adds such pleasures as electric tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel, Studio On Wheels audio, power lumbar and more.

The Sport package, $1,100, adds 18-inch all-season tires, sport seats and aerodynamic body panels to the front and rear fascias.

The navigation package, $2,150, allows touch-screen input, voice recognition for climate and audio, and a rear-view monitor.

Competing cars include the BMW 3-Series, Lexus IS 350, Mercedes C-class and new Saab Turbo black. And most sticker prices - with options - will run around $40,000.

All these sedans have impressive driving qualities and a substantial list of features. The difference comes down to beauty and the brand. What's your preference?

SPECS

2008 Infiniti G35x AWD S

Engine: 306-horsepower, 3.5-liter V-6

Transmission: five-speed automatic with manual mode and rev-matching downshifts

Fuel economy: 17 mpg city, 23 highway

Length/wheelbase: 187/112.2 inches

Price: $34,815; price as tested, $40,365

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