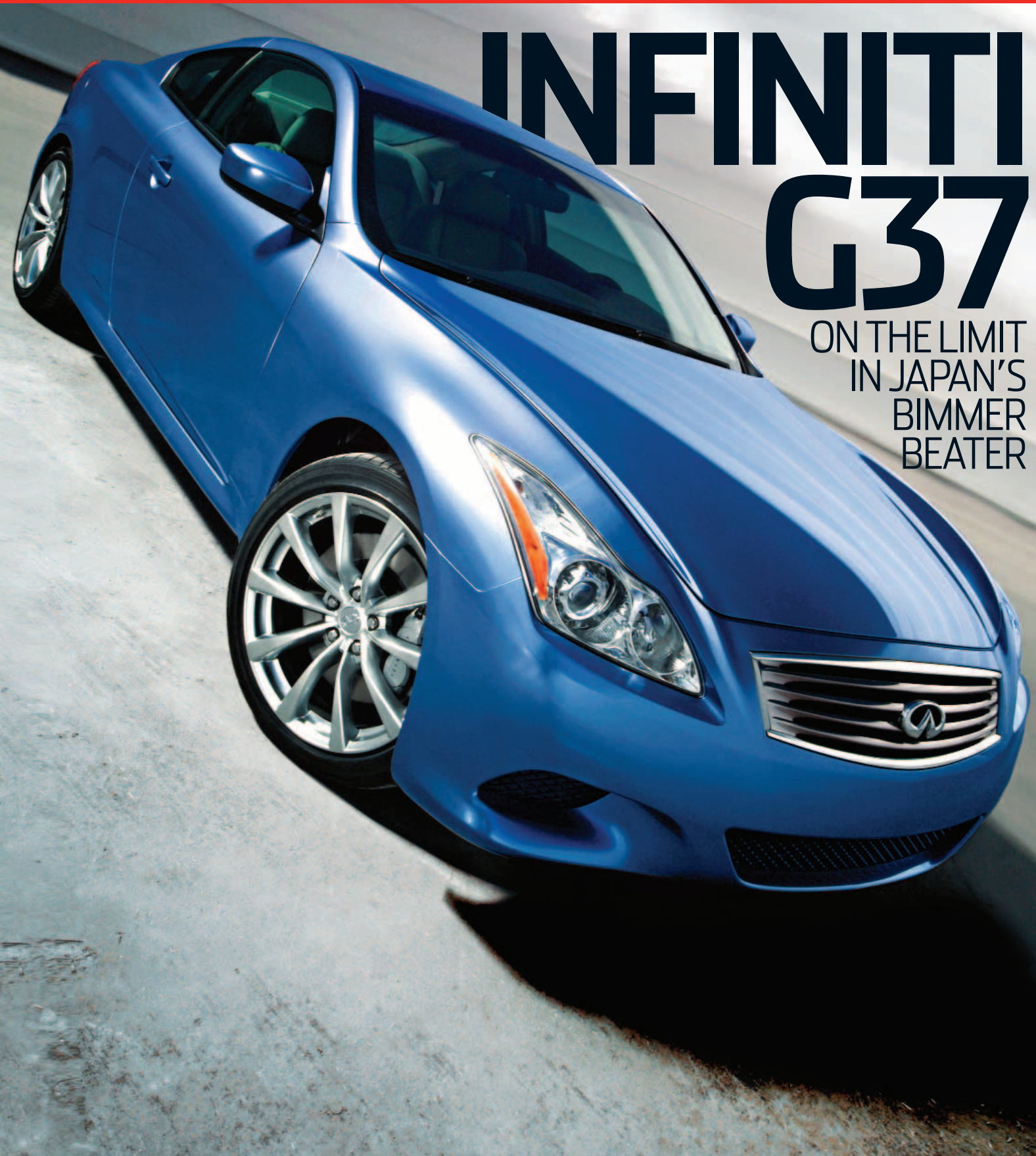


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Automobile

INFINITI G37

ON THE LIMIT
IN JAPAN'S
BIMMER
BEATER



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HEY BMW, CHECK YOUR MIRRORS

A drive of an early Infiniti G37 leaves us eager for more
—and should make the BMW 335i anxious.





A

s revealed at the New York auto show in April, Infiniti is rolling out a replacement for the G35 coupe. The brand-new two-door takes the name G37 and is the sportier sibling to the redesigned G35

sedan that arrived last summer.

The new G35 sedan is more curvaceous and less slab-sided than its predecessor, and so, too, is the new coupe. It is a nice evolution of the current coupe's design and is clearly related to the new sedan, but the two cars share no body panels, chiefly because the coupe is wider than the four-door. Commendably, the G37 coupe is only fractionally larger than its predecessor—0.9 inch longer, 0.2 inch wider, and a tenth of an inch lower. The wheelbase is unchanged at 112.2 inches.

On the inside, the G37 closely emulates the updated sedan, and that's a good thing. The outgoing coupe was a little stark and plain inside, but the new G has a sweeping dash design (much like the M35/45) and nicely upgraded materials. The car is again a two-plus-two with comfortable front seats—seat controls have been moved from their awkward location on the thigh supports—but the rear seats remain smallish and, well, coupelike.

As good as the new car looks, we were eager to drive it, since the current Infiniti G35 coupe

is among our favorites. That car is built on the same FM (front-midship, a reference to the engine location) platform as the Nissan 350Z, and you can hear its 3.5-liter V-6's baritone wail from blocks away. Once behind the wheel, you can't help but hang the tail out at every curve—the G35 loves to dance.

We got our opportunity to drive the coupe when Nissan invited us to their test facility in Arizona to sample a preproduction G37. Usually, manufacturer test facilities are highly artificial environments. Often they include a road that presents a series of different types of bad pavement (potholes, dips, raised ridges, expansion joints) to test ride comfort. Sometimes there's a road-course-style handling loop. But Nissan marries the two into a single challenging track.



Top: The G37 was impressively poised over the pavement at Nissan's Arizona proving ground. Left: Headlamp clusters have been restyled into a stretched L-shape.



Left: The G37's dash is a nice upgrade over the current coupe's. Below, top to bottom: Pedals are metal-trimmed. Keyless ignition is new. The rear seat is carved into two semi-buckets.



Not only did we get a better than usual first-drive opportunity, but we also were able to compare the G37 back to back with its obvious bogey, the BMW 335i coupe. And if our early impressions hold, the new Infiniti is a shot that hits the 3-series right between its angel eyes.

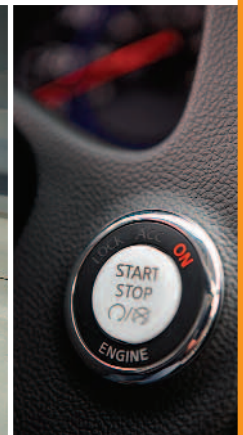
As you'd expect, the higher number in the G37's name denotes a larger-displacement engine. The sedan's 3.5-liter V-6 has been stroked to 3.7 liters for coupe duty. The new version of the engine, which will be exclusive to the G37 coupe for '08, has an 86-mm stroke (up from 81.4 mm) and a compression ratio that is, at 11.0:1, four-tenths of a point higher.

The biggest news about the engine, however, is that it's the first application of Nissan's VVEL (variable valve event and lift) technology. Like BMW's Valvetronic, VVEL controls engine output by continually and steplessly varying valve lift instead of by varying the throttle opening controls. Although the throttle is still in place, Nissan says it's used only for emissions-related purposes.

By having infinite control over valve lift and timing, Nissan expects to improve fuel economy and also plump up the engine's torque curve at both the bottom and the top of the rpm range. Peak output is estimated at 270 lb-ft and 330 hp. Unlike the current car, which has slightly different horsepower and torque outputs for the manual and the automatic, these figures will be the same with either transmission.

Nissan claims that, compared with BMW's Valvetronic, VVEL is 32 percent quicker to respond, 20 percent smaller, and uses 52 percent fewer parts per cylinder. It also allows the engine to rev higher—the 3.7-liter's maximum engine speed is 7500 rpm.

The six-speed manual transmission is a



revised version of the one in the current G35 sedan. Nissan engineers worked to reduce NVH and have also modified the clutch engagement. Both changes will be shared with the sedan starting in 2008.

The car we drove, however, was equipped with a five-speed automatic. Even with that transmission, we noticed no throttle lag due to the VVEL. Indeed, the throttle was precise enough to help us do exactly what the G coupe loves to do best—fantastic power slides. All manual-transmission cars (as well as automatic-equipped sport package cars) will have limited-slip differentials.

The G37 has a new steering gear and, like



the sedan, will be offered with four-wheel active steering. The car we drove had traditional two-wheel steering, although it did have the quicker steering ratio that's part of the sport package.

With that said, the steering in the pre-production car wasn't as communicative as BMW's system. It is, however, a vast improvement over the previous coupe's steering, which transmitted as much vibration as it did road feel. And the production version could be even better.

The second-generation FM platform is not only 36 percent stiffer than the previous one, it also has a wider track and a lower center of gravity. Compared with the outgoing coupe, the G37's suspension has higher spring rates, larger antiroll bars, and stiffer damping. Eighteen-inch wheels are standard, and nineteens are optional. Behind those wheels hide the largest rotors in the segment: 14.0 inches at the front and 13.8 inches at the rear, straddled by four-piston aluminum front calipers and two-piston rears.

On the track, the G37's neutral chassis balance and tight body control gave us a permanent grin. In fact, the Infiniti's body motions were better controlled than those of the BMW 335i (which also was equipped with a sport package). The G37's limited-slip rear differential prevented the frustrating inside wheel spin that plagued the open-diff-equipped BMW, and the suspension heaved less over the big bumps that were strategically placed on the track.

On the brief straights, however, the G37 didn't feel quite as fast as the 335i, nor did its



The G37 coupe maintains the tail-out attitude that characterized the old car. The rear end (left) is more rounded. The V-6 (below) grows to 3.7 liters.



V-6 sound quite as melodic as the BMW's twin-turbo straight six. As with the previous Gs, the five-speed automatic does a pretty good job of smoothing out some of the V-6's coarseness inside the cabin, but the ratios are too widely spaced.

Nonetheless, we came away very impressed. The G37 was a lot of fun to thrash over the bumps, curves, and dips at Nissan's proving ground. We would like to see the G37 move up to a six-speed automatic, and we're looking forward to sampling the revised manual transmission. Infiniti engineers caution that the early mule car was only 90 to 95 percent complete, with final tuning still underway. Even so, when the G37 arrives this fall, it could very well topple the BMW from its perch at the top of the segment. ■

Infiniti G37

Price	\$35,000 (Sport, est.)
POWERTRAIN	
Engine	DOHC 24-valve V-6
Displacement	3.7 liters
Horsepower	330 hp (est.)
Torque	270 lb-ft (est.)
Transmission type	6-speed manual
Drive	Rear-wheel
CHASSIS	
Steering	Power-assisted rack-and-pinion
Suspension, front	Control arms, coil springs
Suspension, rear	Multilink, coil springs
Brakes	Vented discs, ABS
Tires	N/A
Tire size f, r	225/45WR-19, 245/40WR-19
MEASUREMENTS	
L x W x H	183.1 x 71.8 x 54.9 in
Wheelbase	112.2 in
Track f/r	60.9/61.3 in
Weight, dist. f/r	3668 lb, 54.0/46.0%
Trunk capacity	7.4 cu ft