

The Infiniti M:

Much More Than a Middling Machine

By Roger Witherspoon

The New England sky was clear, the one-lane highway undulating north through a hilly section of rural Massachusetts was empty and the appearance of the farm tractor in the middle of the road was like a magician's trick: it wasn't there, and then, suddenly, it was.

From the crest of one small hill rolling past farmland the road ahead had been clear. But as I came up out from a dip in the road with the speedometer hugging 60, there was a farmer crossing the highway atop a plodding John Deere, blocking the northern lane and part of the southern one, who hit the brakes when he spotted me.

There was no time to stop. I swerved sharply. The left front and rear wheels ground in the gravel and dirt on the edge of the road, the right wheels rolled on the pavement and the traction control worked overtime maintaining stability and power despite the uneven surfaces as the sedan snaked swiftly around the big farm machine. Through the rear view mirror, I saw the farmer wave as he receded from view.

Sometimes, there are advantages to riding in luxury sedans like the Infiniti M45, where equal care was given to getting you there safely, and getting you there comfortably. Under the hood is a 325-horsepower V-8 engine which is capable of comfortably cruising in triple digits all day long. The M has all wheel drive which couples with the traction and stability control systems to ensure the full size sedan can roll safely on any surface. There is even a "snow mode" for added wintertime stability. The styling is trim with soft, flowing lines and a long sloping front, a look that is pleasant, but not a head turner.

Inside is another story, where both the decorators and technicians had free reign. First, it is spacious – the starting four from any NBA team could comfortably do a cross country road trip without damaging either their heads or knees. The seats are supple, double stitched leather, with leather padding on the arm rests and door panels so the arms do not look battered and bruised at the end of a long ride. The leather décor is augmented by a liberal use of African rosewood trim.

For the ride itself, the M comes with a five speed automatic transmission which shifts seamlessly through its gears, or an electronic manual mode using the floor gear shift. For safety, the M has adaptive cruise command – the type which uses radar to keep a set distance between the M and the car in front. The distance between cars can be changed by the touch of a button on the steering wheel. There is a soft lane change alert, which is especially useful on dark roads or rainy nights when it is difficult to spot the dotted lines between lanes. That alert is coupled to drift protective system which notes when the driver has drifted off the right side of the lane, and not only rings an alarm, but nudges the steering wheel back towards the center of the lane. It is, perhaps, the first step en route to the smart cars long envisioned by science fiction writers which drive themselves and eliminate the human mistakes which lie at the root of too many accidents.

For entertainment, the M offers a range of choices. There is AM/FM and XM satellite radio; all broadcast over a Bose 5.1 surround sound system featuring 14 speakers which could easily entertain the hordes at a Manhattan block party, or lull you to sleep

with a reverie from vintage Quincy Jones. The XM satellite radio also provides the latest traffic information for the navigation system.

There is both a single disc CD player and a DVD player – though the latter only works when the car is stationary – and an iPod connection and flash port for MP3 files. The package is rounded out by Infiniti’s 9.3 GB music box, which lets you record your CD or iPod collection and store them for future play. For the cell phone users, there is Bluetooth connectivity, which is quick and simple to set up and easy to use.

All the systems are accessible through the seven-inch LCD screen which is activated either by touch or voice. Either of these systems is preferable to fumbling with a joy-stick while driving and trying to focus attention on the road ahead. The screen also turns into a back up camera, which is particularly useful in mall parking lots where too many parents let their toddlers – who could not be seen over the trunk of the average car – run free.

If there is a drawback to the M45, it is that the car has more wind noise at high speeds than one would expect from a vehicle costing \$60,000. Cranking up the bass a bit on the Music box, however, will dampen the outside interference and the noise won’t detract from an otherwise fine ride.

2008 Infiniti M45

MSRP:		\$60,015
EPA Mileage:	14 MPG City	20 MPG Highway
As Tested Mileage:		16.8 MPG Highway

Performance/ Safety:

4.5-Liter DOHC V-8 engine producing 325 horsepower and 336 pound/feet of torque; 5-speed automatic transmission with manual shift mode; all wheel drive with snow mode; independent double wishbone front suspension with anti-roll bar; independent multi-link rear suspension; 4-wheel anti-lock brakes; power steering; traction control; front seat-mounted, side-impact air bags; roof-mounted curtain side impact airbags; fog lights and high density headlights; 18-inch 5-spoke aluminum alloy wheels; heated side view mirrors with reverse tilt down; lane departure warning and prevention system.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM/ XM satellite radio; Bose 5.1 surround sound with 14 speakers; CD player and compact flash slot for MP3 files; iPod interface; 9.3GB music box hard drive; DVD player; navigation system with touch screen and XM traffic; voice recognition system; Bluetooth phone connection; tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls; power sunroof; rear view video monitor; heated, leather seats; African rosewood trim.