

Infiniti's Road Running

Home Away from Home

By Roger Witherspoon

It was after midnight, and the clouds depositing a soft rain over Bear Mountain State Park, just south of West Point, blocked any trace of light from the waning moon.

I rounded a curve and caught a flash of gray fur in the light from the high beams, then a second, more sluggish furball – a pair of foxes, with one carrying a woodchuck home for dinner. There wasn't really time to brake, but there was a chance to weave.

I turned the wheel sharply left, so the 20-inch wheels on the driver's side were riding on wet grass while the right side was on the highway, counting on Infiniti's traction control to take care of the difference in the surfaces. The maneuver let the FX 35 slide behind the first fox, and then a sharp swerve into the right lane let me pass the second fox, the one carrying dinner. I hit the button on the rear camera and saw the furry tails bob into the brush on the other side of the road, and I continued on home.

There are advantages to driving a crossover which truly is one – an SUV built on the platform of a sedan which, in a pinch, maneuvers and feels like a sports car. It is a segment of the industry which Nissan more or less invented with its smaller, Nissan Murano, and has expanded with its upscale, Infiniti FX, which shares a frame with its luxury sport sedan, the M45. In this case the FX provides the room and height of a mid-sized SUV, as well as the luxury and the performance you might expect from a \$54,000 sedan.

Well, most of the performance of the sedan. Under the hood, the FX 35 has a 303-horsepower V-6 engine which is not going to let you drag race, as you can with the sedan. But it is more than enough power to push the FX speedometer into the triple digits or easily tow 2,000 pounds of cargo. And if you are traveling above the posted speed limit, the FX is balanced enough that you do not feel as if you are about to lose control and roll off of its 20-inch wheels at every curve. There is a big brother version of the FX 35, the FX 50, which has larger wheels, a 390-horsepower V-8 engine, can tow 1,500 pounds more than the FX-35, and earn you an even stiffer traffic summons if you are heavy footed.

Outside, the design of the FX is unique. "Why does it have such big hips?" asked one female observer.

Why indeed. The Infiniti FX does have, outside, this wide, bold, broad stance with flaring wheel wells indicating something big underneath – a trick of the eye intended to entice more male buyers to this upscale vehicle. But, when you look at the FX, the wheels are those of a regular family sized sedan, and not particularly wide, either. But the appeal to men is there, from the aggressive slashing xenon headlights which turn in the direction of the wheel, through its low, wavy, racing profile, to the slashing tail lights.

But inside, there was nothing particularly masculine about it, except that it seems spacious, and you sit high as if you are in a gas guzzling SUV instead of a more modest, six-cylinder crossover sedan. The seats are comfortable, wide, deep, spacious, powered, feature cross-stitched leather, can be heated, and have power lumbar supports to sooth older backs. For those who are passengers, there is ample room in the back for those well over six feet in height without sacrificing their heads, knees or feet.

There are the refined touches, like the maple wood trim on the dash, the console, and in wide patches on the door flanked by more leather trim. And a few thoughtful touches, such as cutouts on the console to hold two cell phones which are easily mated to the Bluetooth communications system. There is a split level storage bin under the wide, leather arm rest and four 12-volt outlets for recharging the phones or powering other items.

On the electronic side, the information center is set in an 8-inch touch screen which makes every function easily accessible and understandable. It houses a navigation system which is among the easiest and most complete to use, on or off the road. But this is also responsive to voice commands.

There are a number of electronic safety features built into the FX, beginning with the cameras. The FX provides two views automatically when you place the car into reverse: a straight rear view, and an overhead view of the entire car showing what objects are in range of the door if it were opened. At the push of a button, however, you can switch the rear view to a forward view – something which is handy if you are trying to parallel park into a tight space. The side view is also helpful in parking lots, where toddlers may be strolling by who are too small for you to see through the expansive windows. The rear and front camera can also be used when the car is moving, a feature you don't usually find, but one which may be helpful if you think the car gaining on you from behind is moving erratically.

Among the fingertip controls on the adjustable leather steering wheel is an adaptive cruise control, which lets you set both speed and distance between the FX and any car in front of you. If you are gaining on a vehicle, the FX will automatically match speeds until the slower car is out of the way, and then it will resume the preset speed.

For entertainment, the FX 35 features a 9.3 GB music box hard drive working with the entertainment system so you can download a few hundred of your favorites CDs and have, essentially, an in-house, rolling iPod. The music will float over a Bose sound system with 11 speakers and 2 subwoofers. There is only a single CD player, but that is mostly to let you record onto the music box, along with the USB port, and iPod and MP3 connections. In addition to the music of your choice, the FX has XM satellite radio and mates this to the navigation system with Real Time Traffic, thus allowing motorists to bypass the worst of the rush hour delays.

The FX35 is the antidote to vehicles which draw the query “Are we there, yet?” With the FX, you're always eager for another, longer ride.

2009 Infiniti FX 35 AWD

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| MSRP: | | \$53,915 |
| EPA Mileage: | 16 MPG City | 21 MPG Highway |
| As Tested Mileage: | | 14.6 MPG Mixed |
| Towing Capacity: | | 2,000 Pounds |

Performance / Safety:

3.5-Liter DOHC aluminum V-6 engine producing 303 horsepower and 262 pound-feet of torque; 7-speed automatic overdrive transmission with manual shift and snow mode; All wheel drive; front & rear vented disc brakes; independent double-wishbone front & multi-link rear suspension; 20" split 5-spoke aluminum alloy wheels; xenon headlights and adaptive front lighting system; integrated front fog lights; magnesium paddle shifts; brake assist; forward collision warning; lane departure warning system; distance control; around-view monitor and backup camera; dual stage supplemental airbags; roof mounted curtain side-impact air bags w/rollover sensor; traction control system.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; navigation system with real time traffic; 9.3 GB MusicBox hard drive and compact flash slot; single CD player in dash; iPod and MP3 connection; 8-inch color touch screen display; Bose premium audio system with 11 speakers and 2 subwoofers; steering wheel audio controls; Bluetooth connection; power, heated front seats; power sunroof; tilt, telescope steering wheel; quilted leather seats.