

Shifting Gears

[The Infiniti M-35 Hybrid: Sometimes a Gas Saver](#)

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I knew it was a hybrid. I just didn't care.

Saving money in a hybrid is mostly a matter of with fulfillment: you want better mileage, so you drive differently than you normally would. Instead of burning rubber, you take off slowly, allowing the electric motor to accelerate the car at a rate slow enough to allow you to finish your morning cup of tea before reaching the nearest intersection.

On the highway, you avoid the passing lanes and go with the slow flow. If you have to change lanes, you wait till there is an opening rather than hitting the accelerator and jumping into a small, moving slot. All the while, you are watching a luminous dial by the speedometer giving you a second by second reading of your gasoline miles per gallon – and you really, really like the number to be north of 50. It's a sensible, safe, self-taught, economic way to drive – but only if you are in the mood to be sensible, safe, and economic.

Which brings this discussion back to a sunny day with a dry, nearly empty highway, and the 2012 Infiniti M-35 hybrid. At the push of a button, the eight-inch, color navigation screen

readily shows you where the power is coming from – the 302-horsepower, V-6 gasoline engine, the 67 horsepower electric motor, or both if you mash the pedal to the floor. The latter move, of course, defeats the purpose of a gas saving hybrid.

But then, the hybrid combo can be viewed as a gasoline engine enhancer, rather than a gas saver – and the nearly 200 pound-feet of additional torque provided by the electric motor directly to the axels pushes this hybrid, family sedan into the category of a sports car.



So I floored it. The 18-inch rear wheels dug in as the M shot forward, the speedometer hitting 60 in just over five seconds and passing 100 and the quarter mile in just over 13 seconds. And then, since one can't go too far or fast on the Northeast highways without upsetting the guys with the sirens and guns, it was time to slow down, act responsibly, and enjoy the ride.

One can actually get a speeding ticket while acting responsibly in the M-35 – its electric motor is capable of pushing the car past 60 miles per hour, about twice the norm for most hybrid electric motors. The combined system provides the power of a V-8 engine while sipping gasoline like a more sedate 4-cylinder, Audi A-4. The sedan has an EPA rating of 27 miles per gallon in the city and 32 miles per gallon on the highway – but if you drive for fun the actual mileage is likely to be considerably lower and you'll just have to grin and pay at the pump.



There are a number of thoughtful features in the M, beginning with the notion that if you pay \$65,000 for a car you want a lot of comfort and amenities in addition to speed. Buyers in this range are looking for more than mere transportation: The car, as an art form, has to have an irresistible, aesthetic appeal. With the M-35, you can start with the sculptured theme of flowing raindrops. The outer shell is wide with a hump over each front wheel, tapering towards the rear as if the car were comprised of a flattened bubble flanked by two stretched raindrops. It is a theme repeated inside, with oak wood grain flowing in gentle curves across the dashboard and around the chrome door handles.

Infiniti's designers also gave some thought to pedestrians, who might not hear the car coming if it is in electric mode. The biggest danger to pedestrians comes when cars are slowing down to turn, and those who listen but don't look are particularly threatened by hybrids and plug-in electrics. So the electric motor has a built-in whine which comes on when the car starts, and gets louder as the car drives, cutting off at 15 miles per hour on the assumption that pedestrians aren't in the middle of fast moving traffic.

The central console is nine inches wide, containing a cup holder designed to securely hold two large cups or water bottles side by side, and a thickly padded arm rest over a deep storage bin. The arm rest is wide enough to be comfortably shared by the driver and passenger, and adds to the spacious feel of the interior.

The wide leather seats are power adjustable, have powered lumbar supports and as expected, they may be heated. The leather-wrapped steering wheel telescopes and tilts, contains fingertip audio, cruise and Bluetooth controls and at the touch of a button is also heated – which is really appreciated at this time of year. The leather padding on the dash and side walls are offset by generous use of wood trim made from Japanese ash.

Like most cars of this era, the M-35 uses an “intelligent” electronic key, which merely has to be inside the vehicle in order for you to start it by pushing the ignition button. But this key is a bit smarter than most. Once you have set your seat, mirrors, climate controls and turned on the audio system to your preferred sounds, the key memorizes it and makes any necessary adjustments as soon as you start the car.

For sound, the M comes with XM satellite radio, as well as a USB port and iPod connections. The Bluetooth, which is easy to set up for cell phones, also serves to provide music from a smartphone or other Bluetooth music system. It has a single disc CD player and surround sound provided by a 16-speaker Bose system. In addition, there is a 9.3 Gigabyte hard drive music box to store 1,000 or so of your favorite jams. The XM satellite system also serves to provide real-time traffic updates for the navigation system, which is both easy to use and seen on an 8-inch color pop-up monitor.

The M-35 offers a lot for those interested in a comfortable, fuel efficient, luxury sedan. It also offers a lot for those who are primarily interested in performance sports sedans and consider gas mileage a secondary consideration.

Sometimes, it's nice to have choices.



2012 Infiniti M-35 Hybrid

MSRP: **\$65,395**

EPA Mileage: **27 MPG City** **32 MPG Highway**

Performance / Safety:

0 – 60 MPH	5.2 Seconds
¼ Mile	13.9 Seconds at 103 MPH
Top Speed	140 MPH

3.5-Liter DOHC aluminum alloy V-6 engine producing 302 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque; 50 KW electric motor producing 67 horsepower and 199 pound-feet of torque; hybrid net power 369 horsepower; rear wheel drive; 7-speed automatic transmission with electronic manual shift mode; double-wishbone, independent front suspension; multi-link independent rear suspension; regenerative brake system; 4-wheel vented disc brakes; anti-lock braking system; 18-inch, 5-spoke, aluminum-alloy wheels; rear view camera; high-intensity, bi-functional Xenon headlights; traction and stability controls; side impact airbags; roof-mounted curtain side impact air bags; blind spot and lane departure warning systems; blind spot intervention.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/XM satellite radio; Bose digital audio system with 16 speakers; single disc CD player; MP3, iPod and USB ports; Bluetooth phone and audio; 9.3 GB hard drive Music Box; 8-inch video screen; backup and forward monitor; heated steering wheel and front seats; voice activated navigation system; leather, tilt and telescoping steering wheel with fingertip audio, cruise, and phone controls; Japanese white ash wood trim; front and rear seat climate controls; power, tinted sunroof; power rear sunshade.

Competition: BMW 5 Series; Mercedes Benz E-Class