



2010 Infiniti FX35

By Steve Schutz, MD

Sometimes I feel like crossovers are taking over the automotive world. They're everywhere. From the Lexus RX 350 to the Nissan Murano to the Ford Edge, manufacturers have discovered that if they tweak a sedan or minivan platform, they can create a new kind of vehicle that combines utility and flair in a new way. Nothing wrong with sedans or minivans mind you; but these days, buyers seem more drawn to crossovers.

Like the Infiniti FX35. A variant of the popular G37 sedan, the FX35 represents a new type of vehicle built from luxury-sports sedan underpinnings. It's been described as a G37 with a backpack, and that's a pretty good description. You get a G37 with extra space for luggage and what-have-you, but no room for additional passengers—the FX seats five, just like the G.

Of course, utilizing the G37 platform means the FX drives and handles well. Like the G37, the FX35 turns aggressively and nimbly, even when you're in a hurry, and freeway on-ramps are a delight. For the record, the athletic FX weighs 575 pounds more than a comparably equipped G37, so it's not quite as sharp as the sedan.

Acceleration-wise, it's also pretty close: the G37 zips from zero to sixty mph in 5.6 seconds, while the FX37 does it in a comparable 6.6 seconds—a distinction without a difference, in my opinion.

The original FX debuted in 2003 and was redesigned just last year. While the first generation FX's exterior design was "wow-this-is-different" with creases galore and an assertive front end that earned it the nickname "the bionic cheetah," the new model looks more conventional. The expected Infiniti styling elements—like the swept back headlights and bulging taillights—are there, but other areas like the roofline, hood and hatch are more mainstream than they were on the previous model.

Inside things are inarguably better than they were. The cabin in the prior FX included plastics and other materials that neither looked nor felt as good as they should in a luxury car—certainly they were no match for Audi, BMW or Lexus, the class leaders in interior quality. Thankfully the new FX closes the gap with excellent gauges, user interfaces and materials.

The FX has one new optional feature that no one else does, and it hits "10" on the cool meter. This ingenious doo-dad called "Around View" integrates images from four cameras located on the rear hatch, front grille and side mirrors to give you a (virtual) bird's eye view of

the car when it travels at low speeds. These views make parallel parking or even pulling into a standard parking space incredibly easy. In fact, Around View is so good, I predict other manufacturers will copy the technology as soon as their lawyers find a way around Infiniti's patent protections.

The FX35 is powered by a 3.5-liter V6 that produces 303 hp and 262 lb-ft of torque. A seven-speed automatic with manual shift control is the only transmission available. It's all you'll need, though the curmudgeon in me remembers when five gears were a big deal. Anyway, rear-wheel drive is standard, and the FX35 offers AWD if you need the extra traction.

Fuel consumption figures for the AWD FX35 are 16 mpg city/21 mpg highway, while rear-drive models are rated at a slightly better 16 mpg city/23 highway.

The base FX35 comes standard with 18-inch alloy wheels, automatic HID headlamps, heated outside mirrors, keyless ignition/entry, power liftgate, leather seating surfaces, power front seats and tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel with audio controls. Also standard are dual-zone automatic climate control, back-up camera, Bluetooth, and an 11-speaker Bose surround-sound audio system with six-CD changer, USB connectivity, and satellite radio.

The Premium package adds heated and ventilated front seats, driver seat memory, quilted leather seating and power tilt-and-telescoping steering column. The Deluxe Touring package (which requires the Premium package) includes 20-inch alloy wheels, maple wood interior trim and alloy pedals. The Navigation package (which also requires the Premium package) adds front and rear parking sensors, Around View, and a hard-drive-based navigation system with voice recognition, real-time traffic, Zagat restaurant guide and weather reports.

The Technology package, which requires the Navigation package, adds rain-sensing windshield wipers, adaptive cruise control and headlights and lane-departure warning. Anyone buying the Technology package also gets a rear-seat entertainment system. A tow package is available for AWD models only.

Crossovers seem to be taking over the world, but buying one doesn't necessarily mean you have to sacrifice driving pleasure. The FX35 provides a great driving experience plus extra space for your gear—a good thing, I'd say. Big families will still prefer larger vehicles, but active bachelors or couples without space needs will like the luxurious and fun FX. Maybe the popularity of crossovers is a good thing, after all. ☺