

# 1990 IMPORT CARS

## Infiniti M30

A matter of elevated expectations.

BY TONY ASSENZA



• There's a definite advantage to being mediocre. If you're branded as such, nothing much is ever expected of you. So on those rare occasions when you do show a faint glimmer of excellence, the event is marked by emphatic slaps on your back and a chorus of "Attaboys!"

If, on the other hand, you're a paradigm of excellence, you're always expected to top yourself. Backslide even once and right away they think you're losing your edge.

We've got a perfect example of the latter conundrum in the new Infiniti Q45 and M30. Even though neither car has yet been released to the public, Nissan's Infiniti Division has aimed so high and promised so much that anything short of drop-dead terrific will be perceived as a failure of sorts.

The Q45, the flagship of the Infiniti line, without question lives up to its billing. It's flat wonderful. But we're less taken with the M30, Infiniti's "budget" model. Not because the M30 is a bad car, mind you, but simply because it shares the showroom floor with the Q45.

The M30 is an improved-for-the-U.S. version of the Japanese-market Nissan Leopard two-door coupe. On paper it reads like a wish list come true. Power comes from a 162-hp, twelve-valve, 3.0-

liter V-6 driving the rear wheels. The suspension is independent front and rear, with an anti-roll bar at each end. Standard equipment includes anti-lock brakes, a full leather interior, analog instrumentation, a power sunroof, power windows and locks, and more. All for less than \$25,000. Such a deal.

Now if this car had a Subaru or Oldsmobile badge on it, we'd probably characterize it as a watershed automobile—a bona-fide milestone. But it doesn't. The M30 wears an Infiniti label, and that's the problem. Our expectations have been raised by the Infiniti promise of excellence and by our preview drives of the Q45. Compared with its world-challenging big brother, the M30 seems like just another really nice Japanese car. Good as it is, the M30 just doesn't knock our hat in the creek.

Drive the M30 and you'll get nothing but positive feedback. It exudes competence. The ride motions are smooth and comfortable. The engine is ideal for extended drives at triple-digit speeds. The suspension handles nicely, with stable understeer at the limit that can be coaxed into a neutral attitude with wheel-and-throttle work. The cabin is comfortable for coast-to-coast motoring, and wind roar is all but nonexistent. "Sounds

great," you say. But the truth is, if you take away the leather, the standard ABS, and a few other items, the M30 doesn't offer anything more than Nissan's own Maxima SE. In fact, for certain types of driving—such as when you need to carry four adults in comfort—the Maxima is *better* than the M30. And it costs thousands less.

We doubt that any buyer attracted to the M30 will regret purchasing one. The little Infiniti has a lot to recommend it, including its rakish shape. But on the Infiniti showroom floor, alongside the breathtaking, standard-raising Q45, the M30 is going to be in an awfully large shadow.

**Vehicle type:** front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2+2-passenger, 2-door coupe

**Base price:** \$23,500

**Engine type:** SOHC V-6, iron block and aluminum heads, Nissan electronic engine-control system with port fuel injection

Displacement ..... 181 cu in, 2960cc

Power (SAE net) ..... 162 bhp @ 5200 rpm

Transmission ..... 4-speed automatic with lockup torque converter

Wheelbase ..... 103.0 in

Length ..... 188.8 in

Curb weight ..... 3350 lb

EPA fuel economy, city driving ..... 19 mpg



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