

DRIVERS LOG



2004 INFINITI M45

DATE IN FLEET: May 10-24 **AS-TESTED**
PRICE: \$46,455 **POWERTRAIN:** 4.5-liter V8;
rwd, five-speed automatic **OUTPUT:** 340 hp
@ 6400 rpm, 333 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
CURB WEIGHT: 3851 pounds

GRITZINGER: Sleeper extraordinaire. As long as you make sure you're comparing apples to apples (BMW 5 Series, Mercedes E-Class, Lexus GS, Infiniti's own flagship Q) on price, this is the hidden gem in the luxury sport sedan market. For the sticker, you get major power for the weight, major appointments without the fuss and major sportiness without the racer look. Grab the leather-wrapped steering wheel, prod the accelerator and launch this rocket onto the roadway with the confidence that you're not only piloting a very capable machine, but one that won't draw attention until fellow drivers see the taillights pulling away.

Infiniti will reintroduce this car on the G35 platform next year, so it will only get better. I'd take the G's manual trans, or at the least its steering-wheel button shifters. I only hope they don't change the M's inherent stealth/sporty factor.

HART: This thing has a nice personality, but it ain't all that pretty of a date. Maybe that's the point. The car is a rocket and the handling is nimble for a car this size. I still like the Q, but the M45 works as a stripped-down version of the flagship. You get most of the big car's goodies at a lesser price.

You will struggle, ergonomically, with the radio and climate controls; it's not as simple as it could or should be. But it has a comfortable ride that lets you keep up with just about anything on the road.

RAYNAL: Hidden gem? It's not at almost \$50,000 large. It's a big, velvet-smooth sedan that is comfortable and fast. But there are lots out there: Audi A6, 5 Series, E-Class, GS, to name four.

I do love this engine. It is smooth and there is power aplenty. It feels well built and the seats are comfortable. The ride is good. I must say, however, that the center

stack screen and all those buttons drove me nuts. I suppose I'd get used to them, but why should I have to?

There are a lot of good-car elements here. A more cohesive package is needed.

WILSON: Well now, here's a twist: I get to agree with Raynal. There are many choices available in this price range, and they are all smooth, comfortable and fast. So that's not enough. What else does the M offer? Well, not style. Not back seat room. Not accoutrements. Not even spirit or character, as subjective as those judgments are. It's just sort of there.

I do like it better than the Q for its stripped-down lack of froufrou, but the in-dash screen really should go away: It doesn't do anything you can't do better and faster with a few knobs and buttons. If you are shy of the Germans and their recent quality control glitches, I'd go with the GS until the new platform slides under this car. I might even save a bunch of money and just go with a Chrysler 300C.

FLOYD: First off, Raynal, this car isn't \$50,000. It's \$46,000 with everything and the kitchen sink thrown in. And you can get one without the premium package for thousands less. What about this is lacking cohesiveness? It has great power, an excellent interior, more than passable handling for a midsize sedan, and it stops well.

Sure, the M45's looks are polarizing, as is the case for a lot of cars. Back seat room? Not many have more (yes, 300C does, but it can't hold the M45's jock in interior quality). Not enough accoutrements? It's got awesome leather seating along with every option any competitor has. I'll take it over an A6 (though maybe not the new one), 5 Series (you'd have to spend \$10 grand more to touch M45 engine performance), E-Class (again, more coin and underpowered unless you opt for AMG) or GS (old-man car). I'll be waiting for my off-lease '05; should pick it up sometime in '07.

MORRISON: For such an "unknown" car, the M45 inspires debate, huh? So I guess that leaves it to me to put it all in perspective.

The price is okay, with the engine making it a semi-bargain, and I'm darn glad it's not a Q45. I'll never drive a Lexus or a 300C. And I won't even try to debate the relative pros and cons of the M45, because as Floyd says, it is polarizing. I will say this: If you want a smooth, stealthy ride with lots of mojo, this Infiniti is worth a strong look.