

One-Year Test Verdict: 2003 Infiniti G35 Sport Coupe 6MT
Too good to be forgotten

By Editors of Motor Trend

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It's easy to overlook the significance, superiority, and value of an outstanding car after spending a year behind the wheel. All the good things tend to be taken for granted, and the little annoyances are magnified--especially in a car with many talents and few warts. So it was with our 2003 Infiniti G35 Coupe, the co-winner of Motor Trend's 2003 Car of the Year, along with its four-door sibling, of course.

Let's retrace our steps. In mid-2002, we had our first look at the darling of the New York auto show, and one editor said, "The G35--Coupe and Sedan--appears to be poised for stardom." A few months later, we had the opportunity to track test the G35 Coupe, and another editor opined, "Squint, and you'd swear this V-6 was a V-12." He concluded, "If you can find a more stylish, better-performing, four-place coupe at this price, buy it."

The numbers? A base-model six-speed manual came in at \$32,595. The first test of this car produced a 5.7-second 0-to-60-mph time and a 66.1-mph slalom speed. Suddenly, Infiniti was threatening high-rent European territory. Next time around, we tested a pair of G35s (Coupe and Sedan) for the Car of the Year contest and improved the slalom speed to 67.1 mph. After winning the Golden Calipers, Infiniti loaned us a 6MT Coupe fitted with the \$2250 Premium package (Bose audio, moonroof, auto headlamps, dual-zone climate,



auto-dimming mirrors) and the \$550 Aero package for a total of \$35,395. Taking meticulous care to break the car in properly rewarded us with the fastest G35 Coupe we've tested: 5.5 seconds to 60, eclipsing the century mark for the first time with its 14.2-second, 100.5-mph quarter mile. Icing on the cake was its class-topping 67.6-mph slalom. We got a good one, a really good one.

Thus began our year-long term with the Coupe (and a Sedan that we covered in our July 2004 issue). Logbook entries began predictably, if self-congratulatory: "I still love it--maybe even more than before. She's a looker, for sure. I appreciate that Infiniti went a long way to distinguish this car from the sedan, though they're clearly related. Clean flanks, nice face, and a good job with the tricky headlight treatment and fast rear deckline. Nice wheels, love the Brembo calipers (60-to-0 mph in just 109 feet), and the exhaust pipes look properly purposeful. However, the (optional) rear wing looks like somebody left an ironing board on the trunk."



Our fuel economy varied widely from just 15.2 mpg after a track test to 24.5 on a 900-mile round trip to Scottsdale, Arizona, for the Barrett-Jackson auctions. That editor commented on how comfortable the seats were for the entire Interstate trek, saying he could've easily done an additional stint. The average over 18,600 miles was a respectable 18.7 mpg, still under the EPA's claim of 20 city and 27 highway.

The G35's 280-horsepower V-6 and chunky shifter were lauded for their sports-car inspiration (from the Nissan 350Z). The car's precise steering and compliant suspension were equally complimented by canyon carvers and daily commuters. The Brembo brakes stop with the authority normally associated with Porsches and Ferraris. We even had an opportunity to lap Infineon Raceway (nee Sears Point) and never detected a hint of brake fade.

Service issues were few: a fritzzy power-seat switch was replaced gratis at our \$92.51 7500-mile/six-month checkup. A recalled brake-light switch was fixed at our comprehensive \$282.77 15,000-mile/12-month pit stop. Other than that, it was an uneventful year--which is why editors began looking for negative things to write. When a car is this good, the temptation to nit-pick is increased. Nothing major, just a short list of quibbles mostly criticizing the layout and operation of the center stack audio and climate controls. Some felt the car was designed as a Japanese right-hand-drive car with its most-often used controls on that side of the cockpit. You'll notice the stereo's power and volume buttons over there as well as the HVAC's temp control. Also, the metallic-toned painted plastic surfaces didn't have a substantial feel or look to them, but proved durable despite our concerns.



For those of us who invited rear-seat travelers, we found the power-sliding seat excruciatingly slow to move forward for allowing guests to access the rear seats. Once in the back, taller folks were concerned that their heads were making contact with the sloping rear window. The rear bucket seats should be considered four-passenger insurance rather than viable seating arrangements. Furthermore, the fronts don't retain their seatback angle and need to be readjusted once rear passengers have exited.

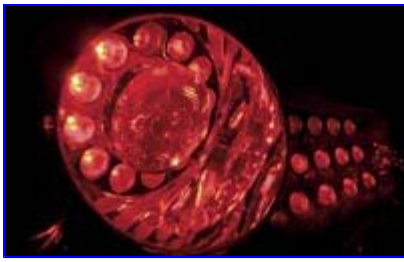


We're fanatical oil- and tire-pressure checkers. The G35's six-bend Rubik's dip stick, which requires threading back into an equally challenging orifice, got the attention of a few staffers. The Michelin tires held up well despite our staff's aggressive driving style and didn't exhibit the unusual wear pattern that our long-term 350Z showed after a similar amount of test mileage. Perhaps the G35's longer wheelbase and different camber settings were more conservative than the Z's.

Other than those minor complaints, the G35 Coupe earned more genuine compliments per mile than most of our long-termers. Based on how many entries ended with, "Do we have to give it back?" and "I'd buy this car," it's no wonder we're anxiously awaiting our first opportunity to drive the 2005 G35. When it does arrive shortly, it'll have more of the things we like (horsepower and grippy tires) and less of the things we don't (fake metallic plastic interior trim). See "What's New..." for a preview of what's to come.

Living with the G35 Coupe for a year only underscored how good it really was. In hindsight, we made the right call awarding it as we did, and we'd do it all over again given the chance. A uniquely stylish and capable car in the market, it's priced within reach of those who aspire for something European and sporty but can't afford a BMW or Mercedes-Benz. It's earned the right to be called a legitimate Grand Tourer in every sense of the term, first-year teething and all.





OUR TAKE

What's Hot

- &bull** Handsome GT design and rear drive
- &bull** Capable powertrain and nimble handling
- &bull** Wide range in equipment and pricing

What's Not

- &bull** Interior isn't up to European levels of polish
- &bull** Difficult ingress/egress for back seaters
- &bull** Small-ish trunk and large-ish fuel appetite

Don't Miss

Low 0.28 drag coefficient with ironing-board wing

Bottom Line

A performance bargain with more style than others

What's New, Changed, Different

There were minor revisions in 2004, but big upgrades are in store for 2005: an additional 18 horsepower (298 total) when ordered with the six-speed manual transmission, tire-pressure monitoring system, and new 19-inch forged aluminum wheels. The interior gets a much-needed dress up including real aluminum trim and new color choices. Premium leather seating is now standard, and there are new exterior colors from which to choose.

FROM THE LOGBOOK

"No vehicle in recent history has so thoroughly embodied all the core MT Car of the Year values as the G35 does. Slam-dunk, Infiniti--all the little stuff will shake out over the next couple years."

--Chris Walton

"A thoroughly engaging drive. Even the shortest commute home helps erase the stresses of the day with a burst of

acceleration here and a nice bit of cornering there. It's as good looking as the 350Z but infinitely more practical."

--*Annabelle Frankl*

"I hate the Rubik's dipstick." "Why don't the front seats return to their preset positions after allowing a passenger into/out of the rear seat?"

--*unanimous staff opinion*

"The G35 works well as an everyday commuter, long-distance runner, and a weekend toy. What's not to like?"

--*Matt Stone*

"Could it be that Infiniti has created the best 2+2 coupe for the mass market? I'd have to say, 'Yes.' From styling to performance, world-class handling to interior comfort, the G35 delights the senses."

--*Scott Mead*

"After driving the Coupe on and off for a year, I still find myself glaring blankly at the center stack, searching for frequently used buttons. I find them eventually, but they shouldn't be this hard to use. All I want to do is change the radio station or shut the entire system off to hear the exhaust note."

--*Brian Vance*

"This is a Z-car for people with lives."

--*Danny King*

"What a fantastic car! It's a shame I have to give up the keys. Can I buy this one?"

--*Allyson Harwood*



2003 Infiniti G35 coupe 6MT	
Powertrain/Chassis	
Drivetrain layout	Front engine, Rwd
Engine type	60* V-6, DOHC, 4 valves/cyl, alum block and heads
Displacement, ci/cc	213.5 / 3498
Max horsepower SAE net	280 @ 6200 rpm
Max torque SAE net lb-ft	270 @ 4800 rpm
Transmission	6-speed manual
Suspension, front; rear	Multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Brakes, f;r	12.8-in vented disc; 13.1-in vented disc, ABS
Wheels	18x8.0, cast alum
Tires, f;r	225/45R18 91W; 245/45R18 96W Michelin Pilot Sport
Traction control	Yes
Dimensions	
Wheelbase, in	112.2
Length, in	182.2
Width, in	71.5
Height, in	54.8
Curb weight, lb (mfr)	3450
Seating capacity	4
Cargo capacity, cu ft	7.8
Fuel capacity, gal	20.0
Test Data	
0-60 mph, sec	5.5
1/4 mile, sec @ mph	14.2 @ 100.5
Braking, 60-0 mph, ft	109
Skidpad, g	0.89
600-ft slalom, mph	67.6
Total mileage	18,600
Avg test mpg	18.7
Problem areas	Driver-seat switch, brake lamp

	switch
Maintenance cost	\$375.28
Normal wear cost	\$0
Consumer Info	
Base price	\$32,595
Price as tested	\$35,395
Current value,whlse/retail*	\$23,759 / \$31,711 *According to IntelliChoice
Airbags	Dual front; front side; front/rear head curtain
EPA mpg, city/hwy	20 / 27
Range, city/hwy, miles	400 / 540
Basic warranty	4 yrs/60,000 miles
Powertrain warranty	6 yrs/70,000 miles
Roadside assistance	4 yrs/60,000 miles
Recalls	4: Brake-light switch, headlamp adj cap, fuel hose inspect/attach, engine sensor replace