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## THE KING IS DEAD!

HOW INFINITI'S G37  
BEAT BMW'S  
335i COUPE  
FULL TRACK  
TEST



(cover story) head to head

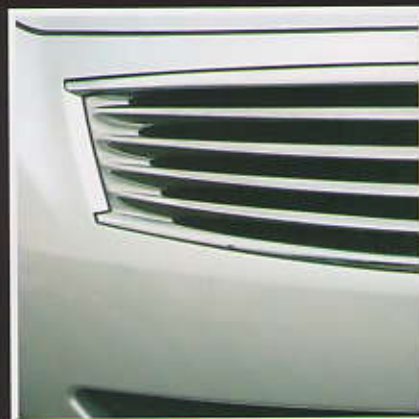
# takefour

JUST IN TIME FOR THE SUMMER SEQUEL SEASON,  
IT'S THE FOURTH INSTALLMENT  
IN THE CLASSIC CONFLICT BETWEEN EAST AND WEST,  
OLD MONEY AND NEW, YOUTH AND BEAUTY,

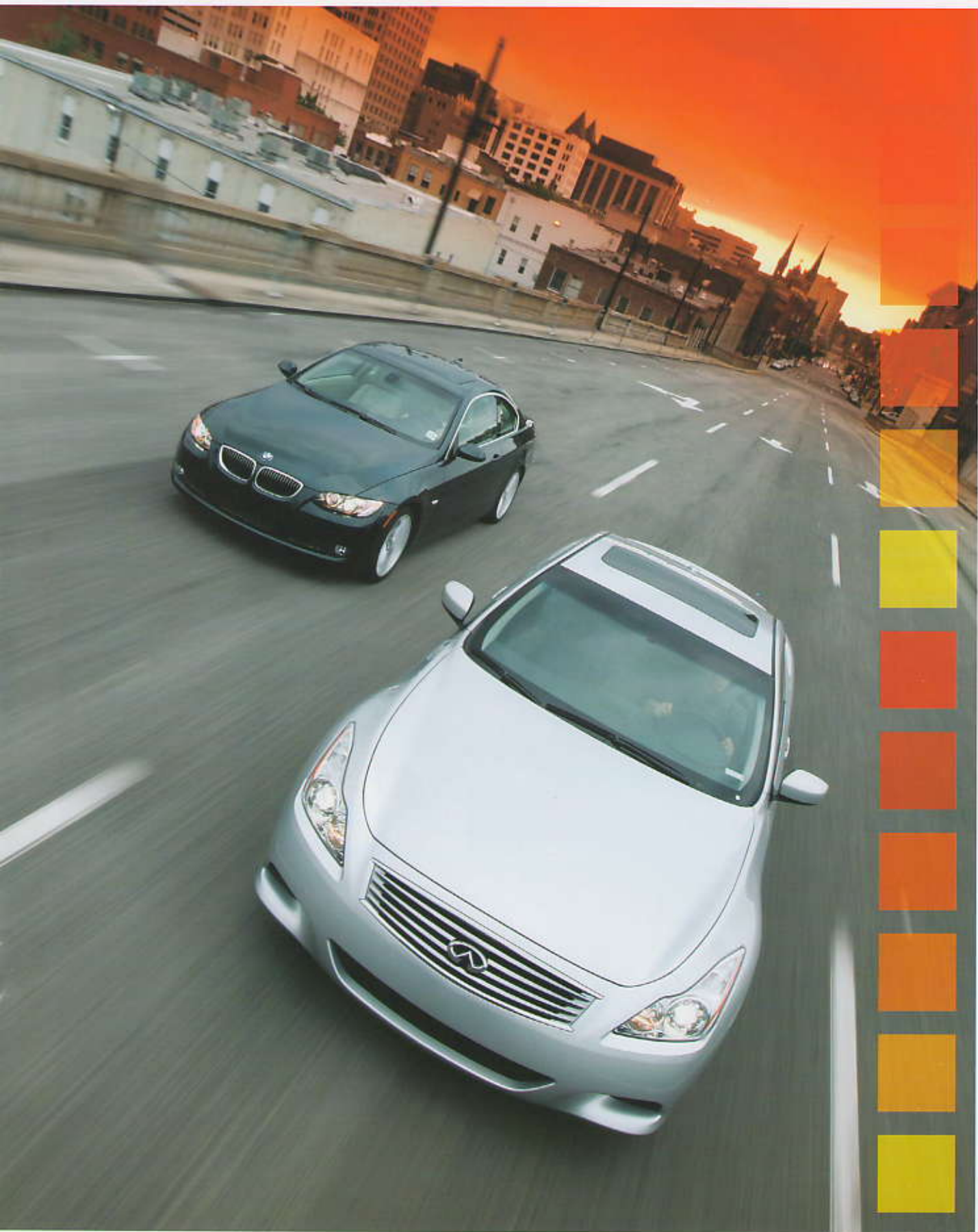
INFINITI VERSUS BMW

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■ photographs **wesley allison**



BMW 335i VS. INFINITI G37S



## (cover story) head to head

**"The most exciting grudge match since Mustang-Camaro 17!"**

*The Village Vocalist*

**"More plot twists and phrase turns than Evo-versus-STI 6"**

*Entertainment Weekly*

### IF THE POSTERS AND

trailers make this movie seem formulaic and predictable because the cars are of the same generation as the sedan versions that faced off just 10 months ago, allow us to persuade you to read more deeply into this plot synopsis. You see, much more thought and effort went into producing these stylish coupes than a mere rear-door-ectomy and a judicious stop in the hair and makeup trailer. Each sports a new engine, for example. The BMW's motivation comes from a hot (in more ways than one) new twin-turbo six that spools up an even 300 horsepower and pound-feet. That's plenty to overcome the 3's performance deficit against the G in their last two encounters, but Infiniti has retaliated by stroking its venerable 3.5-liter VQ V-6 to 3.7 liters. This plus a sophisticated variable valve timing and lift system combine to give the

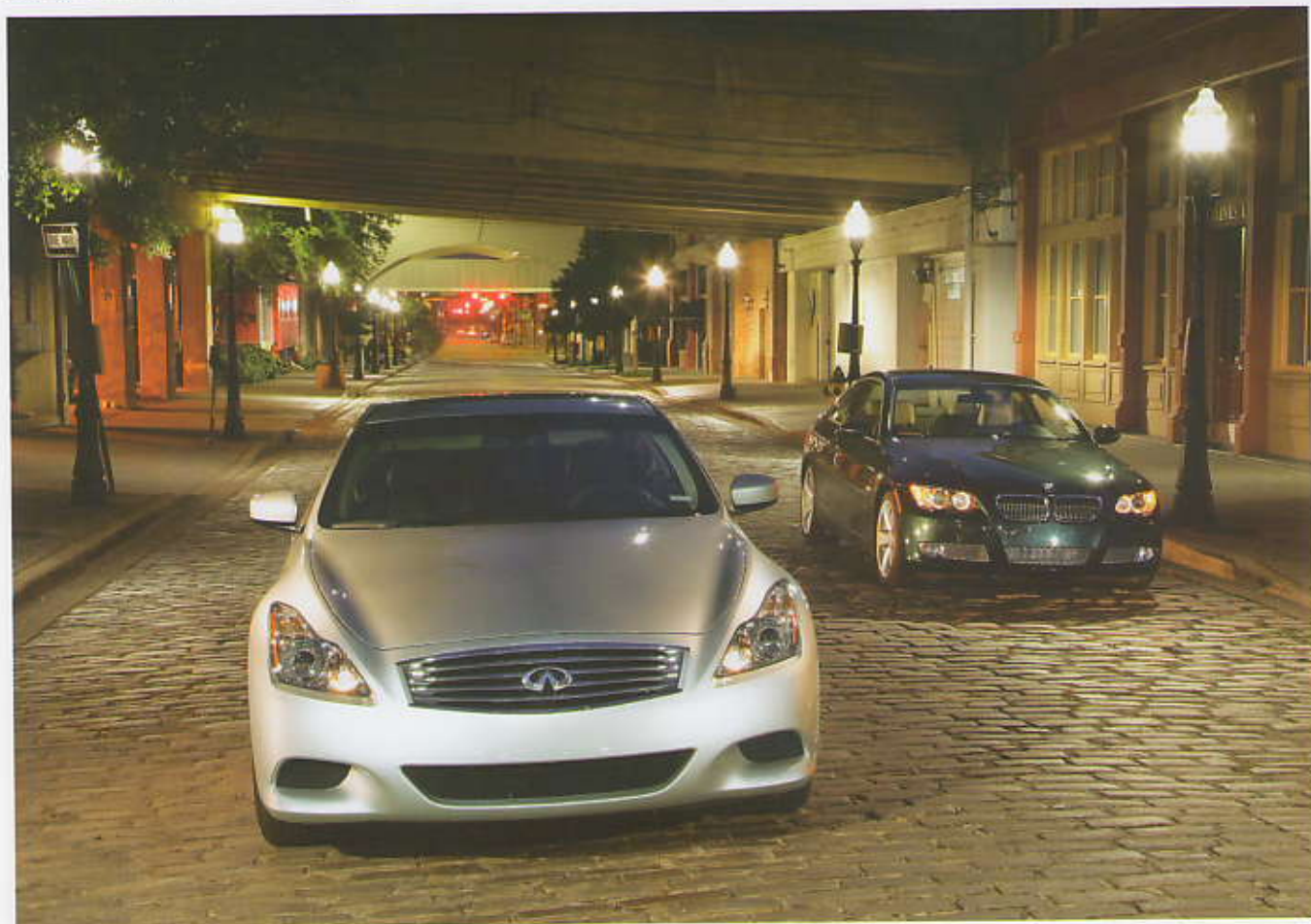
G37 coupe a 10-percent advantage in horsepower with a similar disadvantage in torque, relative to the 335i. Our Infiniti also sports a clever 4-Wheel Active Steering system that was available but not fitted to our last sedan. Might that casting choice have allowed the dynamically scintillating BMW to upstage its otherwise better-performing, roomier, and less-expensive Japanese rival? Will power and chassis gizmology be enough to turn the tables this time out?

**Don't miss "Take Four," in limited release now!**

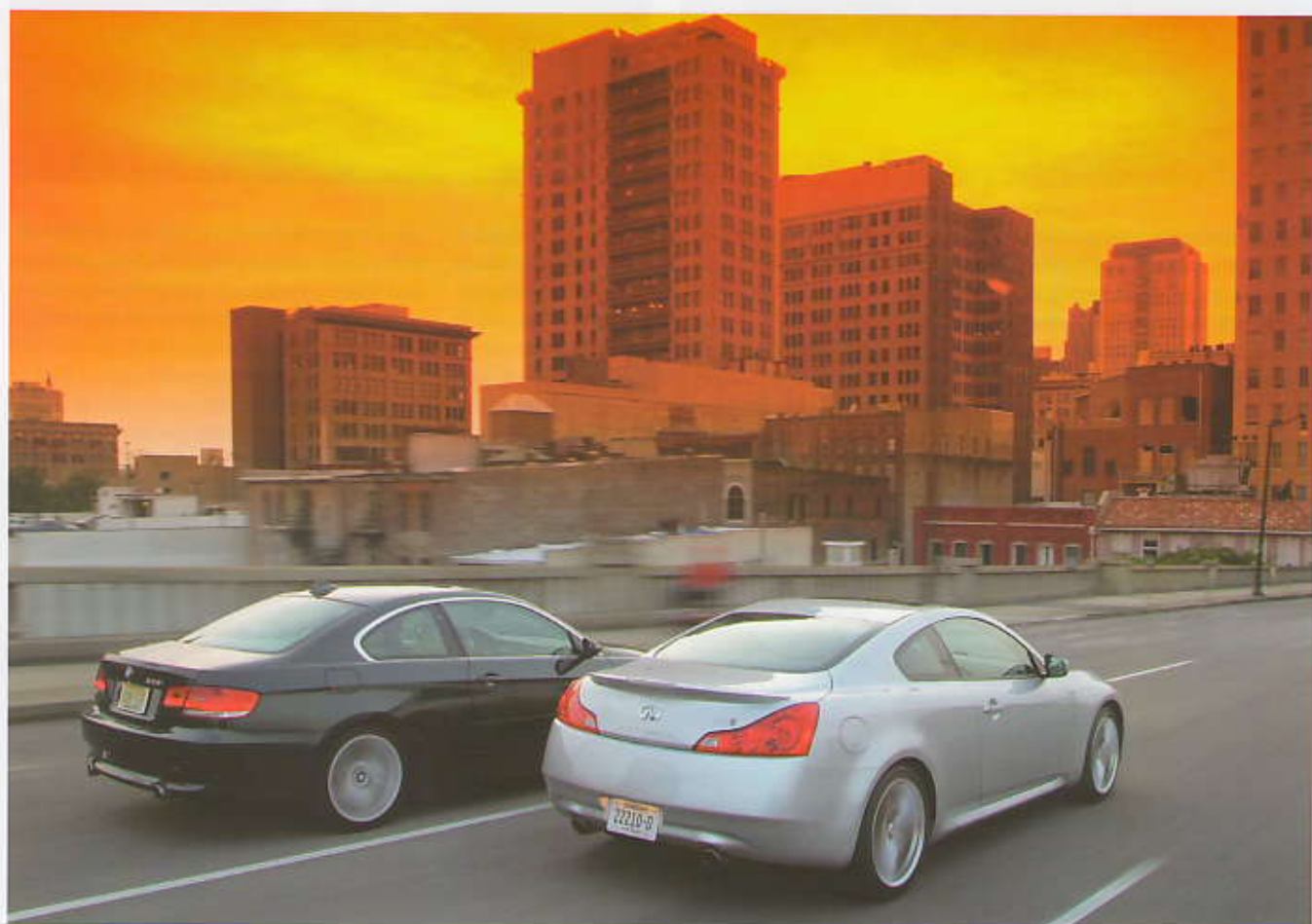
All contrived plot devices aside, this is a very different comparison, if for no other reason than coupes are such different animals from sedans. With little or no pretense to practicality, their designers are given extra latitude to help seduce the emotional right brains of prospective buyers, which is why these two-doors bear only a family resemblance to their more sensible siblings. Measured against their sedan stablemates, the BMW is 2.4 inches longer and 1.8 inches lower, and the Infiniti is 2.8 inches wider and lower, and each offers less passenger and

cargo space—clear concessions to form over function.

The payoff in each case is sleek, svelte, eye-catching style that speaks volumes about each car's personality and pedigree. The G37 resembles a Japanese calligrapher's brush-stroke gesture drawing come to life, minimally adorned with distracting cut lines and ornamentation. Young Californian testing whiz Scott Mortara was smitten by its J-pop cachet. The BMW's classic proportions, poised-to-pounce stance, and menacing four-eyed visage held the greater appeal for this Midwestern mid-lifer. And these personality traits carry over to the interiors—wood veneers and soft, double-stitched leather are applied liberally to the establishment BMW's cockpit, while the innovative Infiniti gets aluminum trim with a Japanese *washi*-paper finish and violet mood lighting. Those few coupe buyers who envision transporting human adults in back should note that these short-straw carpoolers will be a lot less cranky in the BMW. Although the Infiniti stands 0.8 inch taller than the BMW, its roof peaks forward of the driver's head, then swoops dramatically down through the



BMW 335i VS. INFINITI G37S





rear head environment, shaving 1.6 inches off the BMW's head-clearance figure. Sub-six-footers will find ample head- and legroom in the 335i, along with amenities like a center armrest, A/C vents, reading lights, and good outward visibility—none of which our Infiniti affords. The G35's low, bobbed tail limits trunk space to a convertible-like 7.4 cubic feet—6.1 fewer than the G35 sedan's and 3.7 less than the Bimmer coupe's.

**THE ACTION** in this drama begins at Barber Motorsports Park, near Birmingham, Alabama, a splendid 2.4-mile circuit featuring



80 feet of elevation change and 16 sweeping turns through lush green landscaping. Infiniti has rented the place to host the first extensive drive of its new baby. On this broad, fast track, the G37 grips hard with minimal noticeable roll and generally feels quite capable—its massive 14.0-inch front and 13.8-inch rear brakes (S models only) endure multiple hot laps admirably. The six-speed-manual model's new stick snicks through the gears with the same precision we loved in the last-gen 3 Series, but have missed in our current model long-term test vehicle. On hand for comparison is a BMW 335i coupe with an automatic transmission, procured by Infiniti; but before we get a crack at it, one of the drivers ahead of us has cooked the oil to a gauge-pegging 300F degrees, triggering an extended pit-stop that sidelines the car.

Fast forward to scene two. We depart Barber in a G37 equipped with the premium and sport packages, 4WAS (which varies the front steering ratio as does BMW's system and steers the rear wheels up to one degree) and a five-speed automatic estimated to cost

just a shade under 40-large and a fresh BMW 335i coupe, similarly equipped with premium and sport packages and BMW's new ZF six-speed automatic, but priced about \$8000 higher than the Infiniti at \$47,775.

Why choose slushboxes? Because they're vastly more popular and arguably more interesting, technically. Each bristles with paddle shifters and new adaptive sport-driving algorithms that deliver extra-crispy upshifts and aggressive throttle-blipped downshifts when shown the whip. The BMW's also runs with its torque converter locked almost all the time for greater efficiency and sharper performance.

We head northeast toward Fort Payne and Alabama Highway 176, a river-canyon road recommended by motorcycleroads.us. During our 100-mile drive up Interstate 59 to get there, we interact with each car and find the Infiniti easier to get along with. It comes standard with keyless entry and starting (a \$500 extra at BMW), its Bluetooth phone interface (part of a Premium package worth around \$2500 on either car) is more intuitive,



and its A/C and radio can be controlled using traditional buttons or an iDrive-like screen or with voice commands (which also control the nav system, when equipped). An inexcusable gaffe: The Bimmer's radio display goes black when viewed through polarized glasses. Six-foot-three Mortara feels more comfortable in the BMW, but he appreciates the longer telescoping wheel travel in the G37 (the gauge cluster tilts with the Infiniti's column, too).

Our 100-mile drive also includes some nasty truck-worn tilted-slab stretches of freeway, over which the G37 delivers a slightly sharper hobby-horse ride than the BMW's, which generally cushions most road impacts slightly better than does the Infiniti. In no time, we roll into Fort Payne, hometown of country band Alabama and self-proclaimed "sock capital of the world"—a title Datang, China, probably owns legitimate rights to today. Just a few miles east of town, we find ourselves on as delectable a stretch of smooth but tortuously bent tarmac as an enthusiastic coupe owner could desire.

Light rain and mist have dampened the surface, so all electronic stability aids remain on, but each car's Bridgestone Potenza RE050As grip the slick surface with remarkable tenacity. Driven smoothly, with no abrupt throttle jabs, the G37's stability-control nanny never intervenes to the point of cutting power. Peripheral vision picks up a brief blink of the warning lamp every so often, as one big vented rotor or another gets a brief squeeze. The steering feels natural, and the car turns in sharply and predictably at every corner. There's never any hint of front-steering-ratio dithering or rear-axle steering from the 4WAS system, but one is tempted to credit this gadget for disguising the G's 54/46 front/rear weight bias to feel like the BMW's 51/49 on this stretch. With the shifter in the "S" gate, the transmission controller retains lower gears while holding a throttle position in a sweeper and calls for dramatic rev-matched downshifts when braking or decelerating for a curve, providing smooth engine braking while slowing into a turn. Control freaks can shift for themselves, using

large paddles fixed to the steering column, but doing so isn't necessary to go fast.

BMW's natural (non-active) steering feels somewhat lighter to the touch, but is no more or less accurate or innate than the Infiniti's. Both cars are easy to drive smoothly, at least when braking and turning. The 335i's twin-turbo engine occasionally delivers more thrust than the right foot intends, especially with the torque converter locked up as it usually is. Couple this with the fact that BMW offers no mechanical limited-slip device on the 335i (it's standard on the G37), and you get a lot of DSC intervention on corner exits



in the rain, however gently you squeeze the go-pedal. The six-speed automatic offers a better range of ratios to suit any given acceleration need, but its "S" mode shift strategy is less enthusiast-oriented than the Infiniti's, which necessitates use of the shifting paddles on our blast along the Little River Canyon. BMW's push-pull paddles turn with the wheel, and either can order an up- or downshift. We prefer the Infiniti/Ferrari fixed-paddle approach.

At the end of a couple enervating loops in both cars, we're surprised by three things: the fact that neither car could run away from the other, that neither demonstrates a clear edge in handling, and—yikes!—the BMW's oil temperature is near the peg at 280 F—40 degrees shy of system shutdown. This isn't a hot racetrack; it's a cool, 75-degree misty morning. Munich: We have a problem. This type of running, lots of low-speed-corner exits with both turbos spooling cooks the oil cooling those turbo bearings, and our car has no oil cooler. BMW installed them only on manual Sport models until March, when automatics with the Sport package started getting them. There is no recall or factory-sponsored retrofit, but enthusiast owners should consider installing an oil cooler.

The cars are running neck and neck as we wheel into Alabama International Dragway to take a few objective performance measurements. Here BMW's shorter gearing and greater torque erases the Infiniti's five-percent advantage in weight-to-power, allowing it a 0.3-second lead in 0-to-60 and quarter-mile times (5.1 and 13.7, respectively) with a 3.1-mph-higher trap-speed. Braking and lateral acceleration are nearly identical, though, with fade-free 110-foot stops in each from 60 mph, and 0.84 to 0.83g grip, BMW to Infiniti. One race the Infiniti loses decisively is fuel economy, which, at 18.4 mpg on our 400-mile jaunt, trails the lighter, smaller-displacement Bimmer by a whopping 3.3 mpg.

So how does the story end? Considering the micro performance margins and the macro price differential, plus that unnerving oil-temperature issue (what other final development work is the current 335i owner performing?), we send the G37 riding off into the sunset with a narrow but decisive margin of victory—and the promise of a fifth installment coming soon. ■

## ■ 1ST PLACE INFINITI G37S

More muscle and technology deliver BMW brilliance on a budget.

## ■ 2ND PLACE BMW 335i

Still a sublime bucks-up dance partner, but can she keep her cool?

	BMW 335i	INFINITI G37S
<b>POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS</b>		
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front engine, RWD	Front engine, RWD
ENGINE TYPE	Twin-turbo I-6, alum block/head	60° V-6, alum block/heads
VALVETRAIN	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	181.8 cu in/2979cc	225.6 cu in/3696cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.2:1	11.0:1
POWER (SAE NET)	300 hp @ 5800 rpm	330 hp @ 7000 rpm*
TORQUE (SAE NET)	300 lb-ft @ 1400 rpm	270 lb-ft @ 5200 rpm*
REDLINE	7000 rpm	7500 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	12.0 lb/hp	11.4 lb/hp*
TRANSMISSION	6-speed automatic	5-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL-DRIVE RATIOS	3.46:1/2.39:1	3.69:1/3.10:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	Control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	16.0:1	12.0-20.0:1
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	3.0	2.5-4.1
BRAKES, F;R	13.7-in vented disc; 13.2-in vented disc, ABS	14.0-in vented disc; 13.8-in vented disc, ABS
WHEELS, F;R	8.0 x 18 in; 8.5 X 18 in, cast aluminum	8.5 x 19 in; 9.0 x 19 in, cast aluminum
TIRES, F;R	225/40R18 88W; 255/35R18 90W, Bridgestone Potenza RE050A RFT	225/45R19 92W; 245/40R19 94W, Bridgestone Potenza RE050A
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>		
WHEELBASE	108.7 in	112.2 in
TRACK, F/R	59.1/59.6 in	60.9/61.3 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	180.6 x 70.2 x 54.1 in	183.1 x 71.8 x 54.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	36.1 ft	36.1 ft
CURB WEIGHT	3585 lb	3770 lb
WEIGHT DIST, F/R	51/49%	54/46%
SEATING CAPACITY	4	4
HEADROOM, F/R	37.1/36.1 in	37.7/34.5 in
LEGROOM, F/R	41.8/33.7 in	43.8/29.8 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	55.3/51.9 in	53.7/52.7 in
CARGO VOLUME	11.1 cu ft	7.4 cu ft
<b>TEST DATA</b>		
ACCELERATION TO MPH		
0-30	1.8 sec	2.0 sec
0-40	2.9	3.0
0-50	3.9	4.1
0-60	5.1	5.4
0-70	6.8	7.1
0-80	8.4	9.1
0-90	10.4	11.3
0-100	12.7	13.9
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	2.6	2.7
QUARTER MILE	13.7 sec @ 104.0 mph	14.0 sec @ 100.9 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	110 ft	110 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.84 g (avg)	0.83 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	2000 rpm	2400 rpm
<b>CONSUMER INFO</b>		
BASE PRICE	\$41,575	\$34,500 (est)
PRICE AS TESTED	\$47,775	\$39,500 (est)
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/yes	Yes/yes
AIRBAGS	Dual front, front side, f/r curtain	Dual front, front side, f/r curtain
BASIC WARRANTY	4 yrs/50,000 miles	4 yrs/60,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	4 yrs/50,000 miles	6 yrs/70,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	4 yrs/unlimited miles	4 yrs/unlimited miles
FUEL CAPACITY	15.9 gal	20.0 gal
EPA CITY/HWY ECON	20/29 mpg	17/26 mpg
CO <sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS	0.83 lb/mile	0.96 lb/mile
HT FUEL ECONOMY	21.7 mpg	18.4 mpg
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Premium unleaded	Premium unleaded
*Preliminary estimate		

