

FULL CIRCLE

BY JOE SAGE

It has been most of a decade since Infiniti migrated from a more random alphabet soup to its current uniform alphanumeric naming system, yet we still find ourselves referring back to the old models to get our bearings. It turns out, so do they.

Their roots intrigue us, and they shed light on the state of evolution. In this case, there was an Infiniti FX in earlier years, a significant departure from trucklike SUVs up to that point, curvaceous and stylish stem to stern, bearing a powerful V8 and performance underpinnings. Though the crossover term had not yet emerged, this was clearly something different and a real standout in its field. It also inspired a smaller (and not quite so sleek) EX. (It's also fair to say the FX inspired coupelike SUVs

from other manufacturers, notably the Germans, awkward at first, now well executed.)

Over time, the FX disappeared into a QX70 replacement (identical to its forebear) and EX into a QX50 (filling the EX's niche by size and function but in a more conventional body style and shape).

Now meet the all-new QX55. As QX50 had shed the mildly coupelike form of the EX (echoing the truly coupelike FX), QX55 is identified on the one hand as a coupelike version of the QX50, while on the other hand making heavy mention of the FX, so unique almost 20 years ago. (The QX70, FX's previously most direct descendant, has been dropped.)

It's a formula wherein the new QX55 makes a strong entrance as a standout from the boxier line-

up, while it has also let Infiniti seize the opportunity to move this entry into a smaller size bracket, where sales are currently the hottest of all.

Though not packed with horsepower nor a lightweight, the QX55 delivers a pleasantly potent premium drive, benefiting from clever variable-compression engine technology. Shifting is via a CVT, a technology not everyone embraces (though we suspect it's transparent to most owners), though it has an effective manual mode with shift-by-wire promising no-delay shift simulations, along with downshift rev-matching. Upshifting was the weak point, with delay-then-surge behavior at surface street corners (as with some conventional automatics). Sport mode, as so often, helps here.

We took the QX55 for a long drive, west on I-10, planning to grab lunch in Blythe, California. Con-

struction around Phoenix cost us a lot of time, though, prompting us to grab lunch west of Buckeye and ultimately to turn around at our photo spot, between Tonopah and the Colorado River.

Though not a rock-crawling off-roader, the QX55 does bear a healthy 8.6-inch ground clearance and decent approach-departure-breakover angles, for a civilized premium machine. Our photo spot was a great example of where this stylish but tough smaller crossover shines—it's a perfect highway cruiser, in which you can pull off most anywhere.

We had initially suspected the CVT as the source of a groaning whine as an undercurrent, but somewhere in our travels, we realized this likely comes rather from its run-flat tires. Our solution? Crank up the 16-speaker Bose Performance Series audio. Nice. As is the entire interior, from Infiniti's familiar mix of rich materials and surfaces, to an above average user interface featuring Nissan-Infiniti's usual industry-leading multiview camera feeds.

Evolving this desirable vehicle from the size and



V8 power of the old FX to this smaller size allows Infiniti to deliver a premium vehicle starting in the mid-\$40s and topping out in the \$50s. It's a tidy, attractive and fuel-friendly driving package that is sure to win many hearts and minds. ■

The handsome Slate Gray paint job on our QX55 (over a rich Monaco Red interior) is another beauty in the trend toward subtle color-shifters—more of a battleship grey in full daylight, with almost a flat or matte look and feel, though rich in the sheet metal's details, then the deepest of dark grey metallics in dawn or dusk light, providing endless viewing pleasure.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Aguaascalientes, Mexico
SEATING CAPACITY	five
ENGINE	2.0L 4-cylinder turbo, dir inj & port inj, alum-alloy/alum-alloy
HP/TORQUE	268 hp / 280 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	variable 8.0-14.0
DRIVETRAIN	Intelligent AWD
TRANSMISSION	CVT (continuously var) with manual mode, downshift rev-matching
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut w alum-alloy upper/lower alum/steel subframe construction, twin tube shocks, 27mm stblzr bar R: indep multi-link w monotube shocks, 22.5mm stblzr bar
STEERING	direct adaptive steering
BRAKES	F: 13.0x1.3; R: 12.1x0.6, all vented
WHEELS	20-in machine finished alloys
TIRES	255/45R20 A/S run-flats
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	186.3 / 110.2 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.6 in
APPRCH / DEPART / BRKOV	17.4 / 23.6 / 19.1°
TURNING CIRCLE	36.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.9 / 36.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	39.6 / 38.7 in
CARGO CAPACITY	26.9 / 54.1 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB	4065 lb / 58/42%
FUEL / CAPACITY	prem unl / 16.0 gal
MPG	22/28/25 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE (Sensory AWD)	\$57,050
PREMIUM PAINT	695
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	nc
LIGHTING PKG: welcome lighting, illuminated kick plate	925
CARGO PKG: reversible cargo mat, cargo blocks, console net, cargo net, rear bumper protector black film	350
DESTINATION CHARGE	1025
TOTAL	\$60,045

2022 INFINITI QX55 LINEUP

All have 2.0L VC-turbo engine and CVT.	
Luxe	\$46,500
Essential	51,600
Sensory	▼ 57,050