



The Infiniti M's multi-layered exterior combines balanced proportions and stance with a long, low hood and high rear deck to create an efficient aerodynamic shape.

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Infiniti, the upscale division of Nissan, has offered various interpretations of upscale transportation over the last two decades. The M sedan is today's halo car, with a pleasing blend of performance, luxury and technology, held together with style and craftsmanship.

Just listing the amazing array of features would take up more room than I have, so let's look at some representative examples. Performance is a great place to start. There are two available engines — the 3.7-liter, 330-horsepower V6 found in the M37 and the mighty 5.6-liter V8, with 420 horsepower and 417 lb.-ft. of torque, that powers the M56. Both engines come mated to a seven-speed automatic. The car has standard rear-wheel-drive but you can order Intelligent All-Wheel-Drive.

My 2013 M56 was rated at 16 City, 24 Highway, with an average of 19 mpg by the EPA. I accumulated 17.1 mpg — not bad, but premium fuel was running nearly \$5.00 a gallon during my test. The 2012 model earned a 6 for Air Pollution and 3 for Greenhouse Gas from the EPA. Big engines have trouble getting a good Greenhouse Gas score, but you can carefully control an engine of any size for low emissions.

Luxury is both a look and a feel. What other motorists see is a bold, curvilinear design that has borrowed something from classic British Jaguars and Bentleys but is comfortably informal too. It's almost prettier than you expect, and it's comforting to look out the windshield at the sensuously proportioned hood. My tester was a Platinum Graphite M56 — a formal gray that fits for a car of this caliber.



Luxury is best represented inside, with sublime leather seating, Japanese Ash trim and a long list of amenities. Yes, there's dual-zone climate control, but this car has something even better — Forest Air. As part of the Sport Package (more on this later), it removes odors and then distributes the breeze in an irregular, outdoorsy way.

Technology may be the most important ingredient in this super car. A rear-view monitor is nothing that special today, but how about a rear sonar system that detects objects? You have access to the Zagat restaurant guide through the Hard Drive Navigation System, along with traffic and weather information. Rain-sensing windshield wipers are no longer a new idea but they fit right in here, along with automatic on-off High Intensity Discharge headlamps.

If you really want technology, though, you have to order the \$3,050 Technology package. Here you get a blind spot warning system that tells you, with lights, when someone's next to you where you can't see them in your mirrors. The next step is Blind Spot Intervention, where the rear brakes automatically kick in to guide you away if you try to turn into an occupied lane.

If no-one's there but you need to stay in your lane, the Lane Departure Warning and Lane Departure Prevention systems are there to protect you. Forward Collision Warning is part of the braking package that lets you know with flashing lights if you're coming up too quickly on someone in moving traffic. My least favorite part of the Technology Package was the Eco Pedal, which pushes back at you if you drive too vigorously. I'm glad to save gas and the environment, but that's too much nannying.

Further enhancing my tester was the Sport Package (\$5,650) that introduced stunning 20-inch wheels to go with lots of "sport" features, such as the Sport front fascia (dark instead of chrome), Sport brakes with four pistons in the front disc and two in the rear. How about Sport seats in front? A Sport-tuned suspension?

Craftsmanship? The pieces fit together perfectly, the materials are top-level and there is such a wealth of things to look at and touch. It's hard to think of anything that could be missing here. The side panels are made of aluminum to save weight, but are hand-inspected to be perfect. You won't get that on a Nissan Sentra.

You'll pay for the privilege of driving an M56. It starts at \$61,100, and when you add in the \$895 shipping charge you're touching \$62K. With the Technology and Sport packages, the bottom line for my car was \$70,195.

However, driving a car like this puts you in a different frame of mind. Everything is so lovely, so comfortable and so silent. You feel more relaxed in stop-and-go commuting. It feels good to move your eyes and hands over the swirling, exuberant trim and pieces inside. I often found myself feeling the armrest, the steering wheel, the dash, the console.

It's been a long haul for Infiniti — they haven't been the sales star that Lexus has been — but they definitely have found their way today and offer a beautiful alternative to the other upscale four-wheeled choices.