

In The Family Way: Infiniti's FX45 puts tons of Sport into Sport Ute

Monday April 19, 2004

Written For: Sun Drive section, Toronto Sun

Family Way

Infiniti's FX45 puts tons of Sport into Sport Ute

By Lori Knowles and Peter Gilbert

If '60s VW Beetles were called "pregnant roller skates" by snide drivers of big American iron, does that make Infiniti's FX45s "skateboards on steroids?"

Infiniti has created an interesting looking, hard-charging SUV-sports car mix in the FX series vehicles. The FX45 is powered by a version of the V8 found in Infiniti's flagship Q45, which pumps out 315 hp. It also features AWD and just about every neat feature known to man or woman.

The FX45 wows you with styling. There's no denying the FX makes a statement, but it's up to the beholder to determine if it's beautiful or not. Both Lori and Peter liked the FX45's bold and extravagant look. Its design is definitely out there, and, in places, style wins out over substance... But hey, isn't that what art is about?

And the FX45 is sheet metal art—a rolling sculpture that's interesting to study from every angle. Check out the taillights: they bulge out provocatively, adding surface excitement to a usually bland component. The FX is full of such styling elements.

So it's art. But how does the FX drive? For our family, frankly, a little too harshly. The FX45 comes with huge 20-inch wheels and a sports tuned suspension. This made Peter think of equipping Emmett, our one year old, with a Nascar-style head and neck support. There's no doubt the ride is stiff. While the handling afforded by this suspension is phenomenal, the buckboard ride is too great a sacrifice.

Naturally, throttle response is immediate and alarming. There should be a warning on the rear view mirror: "Caution, inappropriate use of the accelerator will cause objects in the mirror to shrink rapidly." Turn in occurs RIGHT NOW, and there's virtually no body roll. There may be blood in your urine, but there's no body roll.

Aside from the ride, the FX45's style is stunning. Its interior is swathed in luscious leather, with generous room for both front and back seat passengers. Rear seat riders also get the benefit of a DVD system integrated neatly into the roof. A fairly generous cargo hold with 60/40 split folding rear seat rounds out the interior. One caveat: the FX's luggage space is restricted by its swoopy rear end.

The drivers cockpit is ergonomically sound, with controls falling easily to hand. The connection to the controls is intimate. Lori loved the power tilt and telescope wheel that moved the instrument pod as well. The passengers enjoy generous head and leg room, especially for a vehicle with sporting pretensions. You don't have the loll-around room of a full-size SUV, but this ain't no Miata, either.

There's a camera mounted in the rear bumper that is activated when you shift into reverse. It displays on the navigation system's screen, and shows a colour-coded grid superimposed on the image. A little caution pops up on the screen telling you to look behind you before reversing. Of course, there is a GPS-based navigation system, and all manner of safety devices and software, including ABS, stability programs and airbags.

The FX45 also offers a laser-guided cruise control system that regulates the gap between you

and the vehicle in front of you. It can even pre-pressurize the braking system to eliminate lag time in a panic stop situation.

In the end, Infiniti has created a vehicle that is neither fish nor fowl. It's not an SUV, and it's really not a sports car. What it does is stretch the boundaries of both styles, creating a new niche of vehicle that goes like stink while offering a salve to those afraid of missing the SUV trend. And it does so at a very impressive content level: lots of technology at a comparatively reasonable price.

We loved our time with the FX45, but its strengths didn't match our needs. In the long run, skateboarding, with or without steroids, is not our sport of choice.

Lori Knowles and Peter Gilbert are a husband and wife writing team in search of family automotive perfection.

-30-

SIDEBAR 1

2004 Infiniti FX45 Crossover Sport Utility Vehicle

Base price: \$60,200

Options on test car: Technology package \$7,500. Includes enhanced information system with 7" screen, GPS navigation system, Intelligent key system, Intelligent cruise control with Brake Assist, rear seat DVD-based entertainment system with 7" screen and wireless remote and headphones, Rearview monitor, tire pressure monitor.

Price as tested: \$67,700

Standard features include: 315 hp V8, ATTESA-ETS AWD system, 5-speed automatic transmission with manual control, power sunroof, aluminum roof rails, aluminum interior trim, bixenon HID headlights, fog lights, dual zone auto climate control system, 4 window auto up/down power windows, trip computer, power tilt and telescope wheel, heated front seats, leather interior, remote rear seatback releases in cargo area, 300 watt 11 speaker 6 CD in-dash stereo, front and side airbags for front seats, side curtain airbags for front and rear seats.

SIDEBAR 2

Road Thrills: A shape nobody can miss, more expensive toys than Neiman-Marcus, sticks to the road like Superglue, looks much better than a Cayenne.

Road Chills: Stiff ride a threat to kidneys and other sensitive organs, jack of all trades is master of none, no Porsche badge, not for the faint of heart.