

Nissan 350Z



So you want something sporty, but can't decide between seating for two or four, automatic or stick, stiff ride or something a bit more forgiving? Have I got a pair for you! The Infiniti G35 Coupe and Nissan 350Z are built on the same platform, use the same motors and both provide miles of smiles. How each goes about its business, though, provides enough differences to give you an honest choice between two great performers.

For this comparison, I drove an Infiniti G35 Coupe with 5-speed automatic, and Nissan's 350Z Track Model with 6-speed stick, spending a week in each. Both come with Nissan's 3.5L aluminum DOHC V-6 engine which serves up 280 horsepower in the G35; 287 in the Z. The 350Z Track comes with lighter weight 18-inch wheels and larger Brembo brakes compared to other Z models.

The G35 is a sleek, distinctive looking sport coupe. Stacked dual headlamps and turn signals reside under clear plastic bubbles nicely integrated into the nose. The roofline flows in a smooth arc from front to rear with nary a break.

In the other corner, weighing 200 pounds less at 3,225, is the edgier, bolder, looks-the-business 350Z. With widely flared fenders, bull dog stance and tighter proportions, the Z is pure sports car.

Inside, both have snug interiors, but the G35 has usable rear seats fine for carrying shorter people. Its front seats are supportive and comfortable.

The 350Z continues its all-business approach inside. My Track Model's seats were covered in great looking fabric, which I prefer in a serious sports car. Warmer in winter, cooler in summer, fabric just grips you better. Leather is, of course, available. Seating will be too low for some, though; more seat height adjustment is needed.

When it comes to the fun factor, both cars shine. Infiniti's coupe corners with

## *Infiniti G35 Coupe & Nissan 350Z* **Deciding Between *Fast* and *Faster* is Tough Business**

enthusiasm and relishes a smooth, winding road. Steering is crisp and accurate. Ride and handling are sporty without being punishing. For maximum fun in tight corners, leave the auto in second gear and attack! You won't be disappointed.

Stepping up a level, the 350Z Track is more sharply focused. With sharp, linear response in steering and braking, great grip from its 18-inch 45-series tires and very firm suspension, its handling prowess is superb. On winding roads it's a tiger, with noticeably sharper reflexes than the G35. Sharp impacts are transmitted though with some harshness, though, and southern California's cement slab freeways will have you jouncing up and down.

As for straight-line performance, expect 0-60 times of under six seconds for the 350Z, mid- to upper-six second range for the G35. Very healthy!

As icing on the cake, I got to drive both models at Willow Springs Raceway. There, seemingly minor differences on the street became major ones on the track, where any softness in a car's setup is magnified. The G35 is competent as a sport coupe, but the Z is by far the preferred track weapon. It has higher limits, is more connected, and gives sharper feedback—all necessary for pushing harder comfortably. However, the very factors that

contribute to its track performance narrow its appeal on the street. The 350Z is a fun but rather hard-edged machine, so just be realistic in your needs and expectations.

The automatic-equipped G35 is EPA rated at 19-city, 26-highway mpg, while the 350Z with stick is rated at 20/26 mpg. My combination of city, freeway and mountain driving yielded 19.2 mpg in the G35, and 20.1 mpg in the Z. Pricing was close too. The loaded G35 came to \$36,196. Subtract \$2,000 if you don't need the navigation system. Nissan's 350Z Track Model (the most expensive variant) totaled \$34,688 with destination.

You've got the low-down; now comes the hard part. How do you decide which will feel most satisfying beneath your driving gloves? The 350Z Track model and the G35 Coupe with automatic represent the two extremes of this dynamic duo. You can further blur the line between them by considering a 350Z automatic or a G35 Coupe with 6-speed stick. Tough choices, but in the end, either model would be a stylish, fun, satisfying car to drive home in.



Mike Cooney is a life-long car nut living and writing in Southern California. Keep him humble by sending your critiques and requests to [michael@globalbrand.com](mailto:michael@globalbrand.com).

