

Auto Sunday

Infiniti's G37 gains all-wheel drive

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

What's an auto company to do with a sexy-looking car like the Infiniti G37?

Build more variations of it, of course.

The 2009 G37 lineup includes a new addition: an all-wheel drive coupe that's every bit as sleek and well-proportioned as its rear-wheel drive siblings.

But the electronically controlled all-wheel drive adds more sure-footed performance on slick roads. It also heightens sporty driving for enthusiasts on dry pavement, and it's the only 2009 G37 coupe with a seven-speed automatic transmission. Other G37 coupes have a six-speed automatic tranny.

Also worth noting, the Infiniti's G cars are a recommended buy of Consumer Reports magazine, where predicted reliability is "excellent."

The all-wheel drive, two-door G37, however, has the highest starting retail price of all G cars. Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, for a base 2009 G37 coupe — "x" denotes all-wheel drive — starts at \$39,565.

This is nearly \$3,000 more than a G37 sedan with all-wheel drive, which joined the lineup before 2009.

All G cars have the same engine: a powerful and easy-to-modulate 330-horsepower, 3.7-liter V-6.

Competitors to the G37x Coupe include the 2009 BMW 335xi Coupe, which starts at \$44,925 with 300-horsepower six cylinder, manual transmission and all-wheel drive, and the 2009 Audi A5 Coupe with quattro all-wheel drive, manual transmission and 265-horsepower V-6. It starts at \$41,525.

The G cars have become the mainstays at luxury brand Infiniti, which is a unit of Japan's Nissan Motor Co. In the first half of this year, the G cars accounted for 55 percent of total Infiniti sales in the U.S.

It takes only one look at the G cars, particularly the shapely coupe, to see why they are the brand's most popular vehicles. The silhouette is sporty; exterior styling is gorgeous.

The all-wheel drive system is on all the time, providing a rear-bias drive most of the time. On slick roads, the system can automatically shift up to 50 percent of the power to the front wheels when needed.

Indeed, the G cars have a bevy of high-tech features available, including four-wheel active steer and cruise control that monitor and automatically adjust the car's distance to the vehicle ahead.



COURTESY OF NISSAN
The 2009 Infiniti G37x Coupe has a bevy of high-tech features.

At a glance

Price as tested: \$47,295

Engine: 3.7-liter, double overhead cam V-6

City/highway fuel economy: 18/25 miles per gallon

Length: 183.1 inches

Wheelbase: 112.2 inches

Curb weight: 3,847 pounds

Built: Japan

Destination charge: \$865

Oldsmobile 442

W-30

Say hello to one of the best-kept secrets of the muscle-car era

BY OTTO STEIN

Wheelbase Communications

As far as deep and dark automotive secrets go, few were any deeper or darker than Oldsmobile's W-30.

It was so secret, in fact, that most of the company's dealers weren't even aware it existed.

The W-30 was meant to win races on Sunday and sell Oldsmobiles on Monday.

It was the 1960s and the Free World was fascinated with power and speed. "Speed thrills" became a rallying cry.

Young drivers began to demand high-performance machines that could tear up a quarter mile of dark, country road or the tarmac of the local drag strip.

Speed and styling became the raison d'être of Detroit's car manufacturers. Every carmaker came up with a performance package and the era of the 'muscle car,' with big-cubic-inch engines and face-distorting torque, was under way.

Quietly, and without fanfare, Oldsmobile became part of the movement in 1966 thanks to a little known, late-in-the-season release of the W-30 ram-air option package, which seeped out of General Motors' towers of primness. Basically, the car was an Oldsmobile F-85 equipped with a 350-horsepower, 400-cubic-inch V-8. A supercar was born.

The project actually began a couple of years earlier in 1964.

With Ford and Chevrolet banging away at each other for a bigger slice of the youth market, the General turned to its Pontiac and Oldsmobile divisions for help.

Pontiac came out with the hot-selling GTO and, six months later, Olds responded with the F-85 and its now legendary numerical designation 4-4-2, which stood for "4"-barrel carb, "4"-speed transmission and "2", or dual, exhaust. The car wasn't much to write about when compared to the stylish GTO, but it showed potential.

With its 330-cubic-inch V-8 taken from the company's 1964 Cutlass police pursuit package, the car ran well but couldn't hold its own against bigger-displacement cars, such as the 389-powered GTOs prowling the streets.

Things didn't change much until '66 when the engineers at Olds slipped in a brawny 400-cubic-inch engine topped with a four-barrel carburetor. It was a nice improvement, but still no trophies.

Fine Lines

Oldsmobile W-30

GTOs were still ruling the road. So, Olds changed the carb configuration to three two-barrels from a single four barrel. The 442's power rating jumped to 360, and with it, gear heads everywhere began to take notice.

But Oldsmobile engineers weren't done, not by a long shot.

Later the same year, they quietly released the W-30. The engines received a hotter camshaft, high-tension valve springs while the components were painstakingly matched, measured and hand-assembled right at the factory.

The goal was simple: become king of the drag strip. So serious, in fact, were the tech heads at Olds that they sold most of the cars in stripped-down versions only, without radios and some without heaters.

The W-30 option package was so secret that the vast majority of the general public had no clue it existed. And neither did most of the dealers. In fact, only 54 of these high-performance pavement-scorchers were produced the first year, most of which went to serious professional drag racers. (A few knowledgeable dealers converted some 442s by installing over-the-counter W-30 equipment, but they were few and far between.)

Success came quickly. That year, the Oldsmobile 442 W-30 brought home the bacon by winning the National Hot Rod Association's drag racing C/Stock category.

By 1967, the word was out about the hot, new muscle car at Oldsmobile and the company finally began to play up the W-30's existence. The result was a jump in production to 502 cars, plus a host of over-the-counter conversion kits known as the Track-Pac.

The big change for 1967 was in the carburetion. The three two-barrel set up was replaced with a Rochester Quadrajel four-barrel after GM brass mandated that only Corvettes could have the multiple-carb (known as Tri-power) setup. As well, the 442 package became available only on the Cutlass Supreme.

The next year, the 442 was named Performance Car of the Year by Cars Magazine. And that year, more 442s were built

A vehicle often has multiple problems

Q. I have a 2001 VW Jetta with a four-cylinder engine. The check engine light came on and my car would just turn off especially at a light or when I was in a drive-through lane. After awhile it would turn on. I took it to AutoZone and they got a reading saying it was a sensor. When they tried again they couldn't get a reading.

I took it to three different places that wanted to charge me anywhere

from \$45 to \$75 but they, too, couldn't get a reading so I didn't have to pay. Then I took it to the VW dealer and they charged me \$140 for a reading they said it was the O₂ oxygen sensor.

I had my husband order it and change it but the light was still on. The dealer charged me another \$140 for another reading. This time they said it was a crank front sensor, so my husband changed that too because they wanted to charge so much for labor. The light is still on.

My husband tried to reset the light by unplugging the battery but no luck. What can I do? I can't go back to the dealer. Money is real tight right now and I can't pay that kind of money anymore. I just don't know what to do.

The car doesn't turn off as much but it still does. The light is still on and sometimes the ES light would come on.

A. It is not uncommon for VWs to have multiple and layered drivability problems. They are frustrating for both the driver and the technician trying to correct the failure.

From your perspective as the driver, nothing was accomplished because that pesky light is still on. In your question you mentioned visiting several shops, AutoZone and the dealer.

My recommendation to you is find a shop that you trust and build a relationship with them. They will get to know you and your car and help you through these types of problems for the least amount of money.

I do not think having a shop or the dealer diagnose the car and then bringing it home to do the repairs is the right way to go about it, nor is it the most cost effective.

If a shop replaces a part that does not repair the car, they most likely will continue to work with you to find the problem. That is not going to happen if you take the car and repair it yourself.

My recommendation at this point would be to plead for mercy and see if the dealer that you already have paid diagnostic fees to will help you out and look at it again at no charge with the understanding that this time you will pay them to perform the repairs.

If they will not, find a good independent shop that you can start building a relationship with right away.

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Doug McAllister
Under the hood



After Pontiac came out with the hot-selling GTO, Olds responded with the numerical designation 442, which stood for "4"-barrel carb, "4"-speed transmission and "2", or dual, exhaust.

than in any other year in the muscle-car era, which generally spans 1964-'72.

The W-30 continued relatively uninterrupted until 1970 when the engine grew to 455 cubic inches and horsepower topped out at 370. The popular W-30 option (about 3,100 would make it to the street) would stick around until the end of 1972, although the 455's horsepower rating would drop to 300, more a product of a change in how engines were rated than the abandonment of any performance hardware.

But, the muscle-car bubble couldn't last forever. In fact, most people believed it had already burst, due in no small part to tightening pollution laws, insurance regulations and gas shortages. The combined effect was lower engine compression and less horsepower.

As a result, Oldsmobile was no longer in the performance business, and an era had come to an end as quietly as it had begun.