

WHEELS

LOCAL VIEW

Infiniti's EX35 a crossover with a dose of excitement

By Nancy Dunham
Special to The Examiner

If you think a crossover is going to brand you with the dreaded "minivan parent" moniker, you haven't seen or driven the 2010 Infiniti EX35.

When I drove the 2009 model last year, I was convinced the crossover was just what couples and smaller families needed because it was comfortable, spacious and had the sporty interior extras so many seek.

This year's 297-horsepower crossover is an even better deal. The automaker has added a host of new interior features but kept models' prices just between \$33,000 and \$38,000, about the same as last year.

It's not surprising that the exteriors of the 2009 and 2010 models are identical. Why fix what's not broken? The exterior and interior "wave" design of the EX35 won raves from auto journalists and consumers alike. Its sleek lines, long hood, double-arch grille, large L-shaped headlights, and coupe-like roofline are reminiscent of the lines on sports cars. Yet the designers must have been aware the crossover might take a beating from kids. That's likely why they used scratch-resistant "self-healing" paint that takes some of the worry away.

This is a time, though, for buyers to beware. Although the exteriors of the 2010 and 2009 models are identical, don't let an overeager seller convince you nothing changed between model years.

The 2010 models have plenty of extras including standard heated outside mirrors, heated front seats, a USB port for an iPod or MP3 player, Bluetooth Streaming Audio, Bose Premium Audio Package, Around View Monitor package, and that's just for starters.

The seats are comfy, and the eight-way power driver's seat with two-way manual lumbar support

STATS BOX

2010 Infiniti EX35

- » **Engine:** 3.5-liter 24-valve V-6, aluminum-alloy block and heads. Low-friction molybdenum-coated pistons
- » **Transmission:** Electronically controlled five-speed automatic with Drive Sport mode
- » **MSRP:** Starting at \$33,800

and the four-way power passenger's seat are standard. That is likely a relief to many aching backs.

The design isn't the only thing reminiscent of a sedan. Although the crossover is powerful, it performs more like a sedan than a truck with responsive steering and braking.

Safety features are plentiful, as well. I especially appreciated the Lane Departure Prevention System. The soft chimes that sound when sway is felt were helpful without becoming jarring, and the smart system senses turn signals so it doesn't chime when a turn is planned.

When you consider frontal crashes account for 40 percent of accidents on U.S. roads each year, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, you see the value.

Although the term crossover convinces many that these vehicles are equally adept at off-roading as city cruising, that's not often the case. The EX35 is a luxurious, powerful and modestly priced crossover, but it's not an off-road vehicle. It's also not great for hauling tons of gear. Cargo space is a modest 18.6 cubic feet, which expands to 47.4 cubic feet when the second row is folded.

Vehicles designed to be all things to all people often disappoint. The Infiniti EX35 is a solid-performing crossover that offers performance, style, high-tech features and cargo space that is sure to please.



COURTESY PHOTO

The 2010 Infiniti EX35 has plenty of extras such as heated seats and premium audio.



TREY PALMISANO/EXAMINER

Stacey Acevero started customizing her 2007 Nissan Sentra around the same time that she started modeling at car shows.

Looks matter for both model and her Nissan Sentra

By Trey Palmisano
Special to the Examiner

In World War II, public service organizations regularly encouraged citizens in the United States to study the underbellies of planes so they could make identifications if perchance an enemy plane entered domestic airspace.

Had Stacey Acevero lived in that time, her ability to recognize cars may have well proved her to be an excellent spotter. At age 10, she confesses to being able to identify most cars on the road, and made a game out of naming vehicles at night with only their headlights and taillights to cut through the darkness.

By 18 years of age, Acevero was done making identifications and was ready to claim a car of her own. After debating between a Nissan Altima and Subaru WRX STi, she eventually turned to a 2007 Nissan Sentra. Around the same time, Acevero became involved in modeling at car shows. Both opportunities became pivotal in her decision to take a rather ordinary car and make something unique on a shoestring budget.

The first decision was to transform the black Sentra to blackout status. She started by tinting the windows. The taillights were also tinted to replace the harsh factory red plastic. Since the '07 Sentra already sports a stylish body, there was no need to spend an extra two grand on a body kit. By dropping the suspension a couple of inches, Acevero achieved a modified look on the stock body. New wheels opened up the bulky stock rim and revealed the brake drum behind. After a cold air intake was added, the engine was

STATS BOX

- » **Engine:** 2-liter four-cylinder
- » **Wheels:** Konig 18-inch Again 4 wheels with Nitto tires
- » **Performance:** Eibach Sportline lowering springs, Stilen full cat-back exhaust, Stilen hi-flow intake
- » **Exterior:** Stilen front lip, badges removed, blacked-out taillights, 30 percent tint, 8000K HID headlights, matching fog lights, license plate illuminators, blacked-out grille, red brake calipers

able to pull in more air from the outside while the aftermarket exhaust sends it chirping out the back.

Part of the problem for Acevero was finding product support for her vehicle. Despite its being a product of a large Japanese automaker, the lack of parts requires that many things have to be custom-built. And for a college student who is rubbing pennies together to make ends meet, that kind of financial toll is impractical.

On New Year's Eve, all the hard work nearly became an insurance claim, when Acevero pulled up to a spot thinking the man collecting her keys was a legitimate valet. It turns out the imposter was stealing cars. Thanks to her anti-theft and tracking system, the car was eventually located hidden in an alleyway, waiting to be transported away, and best of all, untouched and in perfect condition.

These days both car and driver continue to make successful strides. Acevero recently won the title of

CHECK OUT MY RIDE



Enjuku girl of the year for 2009, and she continues to find new ways to trick out her ride.

What do you drive? A 2007 Nissan Sentra.

Why do you drive it? Because it was the only brand-new car I could afford that was a Nissan. I have a special affection for Nissans. Now I drive it because I customized it to be my own, and I wouldn't trade it for anything else because it represents me to the fullest.

What makes this car so special? Nothing really. It is just a regular Sentra with some modifications. But it is special to me because I did everything to it myself and treat it like my child.

What is your most memorable driving experience? When I first bought the car, a few weeks later I took it on its first road trip to Ocean City. It was the most fantastic drive of my life!

What was the first vehicle you owned? A 2002 Suzuki Aerio. It was green and looked like a Sprite can.

What music are you currently listening to in your vehicle? Godsmack.

And your first ticket? What was it for? Speeding. Doing 100 mph on Route 50. Ouch!

Got a custom car and want to tell the world? E-mail Trey Palmisano at trepalmisano@comcast.net.