

BMW 545i vs.  
Infiniti M45 Sport vs.  
Lexus GS 430

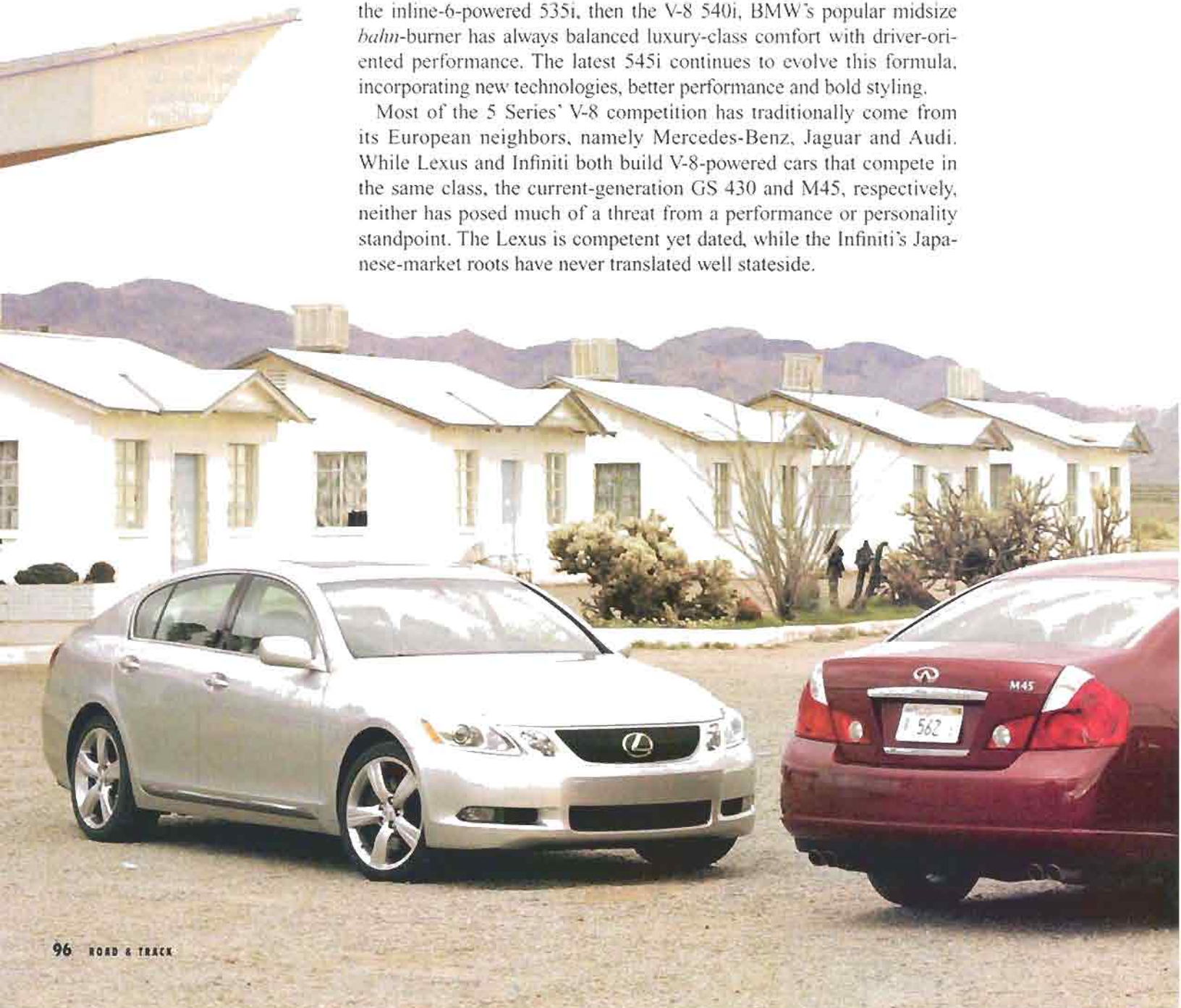
# Rocking the Establishment

Two Japanese challengers take on Europe's sports-sedan benchmark

BY KIM WOLFKILL • PHOTOS BY JEFF ALLEN

**R**OAD **R&T** FOR AS LONG AS FAST, COMFORTABLE 4-DOOR SEDANS HAVE **T**EST been called "luxury sports sedans," the BMW 5 Series has served as the quintessential example of the category. First, with the inline-6-powered 535i, then the V-8 540i, BMW's popular midsize *bahn*-burner has always balanced luxury-class comfort with driver-oriented performance. The latest 545i continues to evolve this formula, incorporating new technologies, better performance and bold styling.

Most of the 5 Series' V-8 competition has traditionally come from its European neighbors, namely Mercedes-Benz, Jaguar and Audi. While Lexus and Infiniti both build V-8-powered cars that compete in the same class, the current-generation GS 430 and M45, respectively, neither has posed much of a threat from a performance or personality standpoint. The Lexus is competent yet dated, while the Infiniti's Japanese-market roots have never translated well stateside.







All that stands to change, however, as the next-generation Lexus GS 430 and Infiniti M45 hit the ground running with their sights clearly set on the BMW 545i. Neither company has made a secret of its increased focus on performance or its intent to knock Munich's benchmark sedan off its perch. With an intelligent blend of luxury, styling, performance and high-tech features, both cars are finally in a position to pose a legitimate challenge to the BMW.

To find out how legitimate, we took all three cars deep into the country around Death Valley, California, for nearly 1000 miles of hard, fast, demanding driving. High speeds and undulating terrain were the order of the day(s), providing a perfect backdrop for determining how good these newcomers really are and whether they do indeed have what it takes to unseat the all-conquering 5.



### 3rd LEXUS GS 430

559.1 POINTS

Last in our test, but certainly not least, the GS 430 isn't so much the loser of our group, as the one that emphasizes refinement over full-on, at-the-limit performance. By no means a slouch, it's still the fastest and most entertaining sedan to ever come from Lexus, a car that will stay with the BMW and Infiniti on most back roads, while delivering a decidedly more civilized driving experience.

During development of the GS, Lexus engineers deliberately toed the line between building a quiet and comfortable "Lexus" type sedan and an all-out screamer. It had to satisfy current owners and their established tastes while also appealing to more performance-minded buyers. To that end, the GS 430 balances tradition with evolution, giving Lexus faithful the

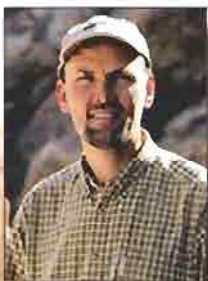


■ Lexus found the right balance between sport and comfort with the interior of the GS 430. The stylish layout has easy-to-use controls, a touch-screen interface and a high-quality feel; rear head room is tight.

refinement they're used to in a faster, better-handling and more stylish package. Along the way, it also offers enthusiasts a genuine performer, a rakish new contender with more than enough snap to satisfy all but the most fanatic sports-sedan drivers.

Compared with the car it replaces, the third-generation GS 430 is an improvement in every way. Outside, its exterior styling retains a touch of the second generation's character, with a sleeker, more updated and coupe-like profile. The look is contemporary, and of the three cars, the one that enjoyed nearly universal praise throughout our trip. Rear-seat head room suffers slightly because of the sloping roofline, but only the tallest passengers will take issue.

The story is the same inside, where typical Lexus attention to detail produces a rich and attractive cabin. A modern, high-tech



DOUGLAS KOTT, Executive Editor

**In My Opinion...** Evolving from what was a fairly nondescript, cut-rate version of the Q45 into this present iteration, the M45 gets my vote and a "Most Improved" plaque to boot. I was won over by its V-8's solid low- and midrange power, straightforward controls in an interior that manages to be both warm and sporty, and surprising back-road tenacity. And the M's throttle-blip feature on downshifts should be the industry standard.







theme is prevalent throughout, the sweeping dash highlighted by machined aluminum gauge faces, a chrome-trimmed Start button and on our test car, dark maple wood accents. The center touch-screen interface isn't quite as user-friendly as the M45's, but is still miles ahead of the BMW's iDrive. And the beautifully sculpted seats strike the right balance between comfort and support, another area where the Lexus excels.

While it shares the same 4.3-liter V-8 as its predecessor, an all-new 6-speed automatic allows the engine to make much better use of its 300 bhp and 325 lb.-ft. of torque. Power delivery is turbine smooth and Lexus quiet, accompanied by quick, seamless shifts in both automatic and sequential manual modes. The bigger 4.4-liter BMW and 4.5-liter Infiniti V-8s are

slightly stronger off the bottom end, but once the Lexus gets into the midrange, it pulls eagerly to redline: 60 mph arrives in just 5.7 seconds, the quarter mile in 14.2 sec, at 99.5 mph.

Clearly, much attention has been paid to the chassis and how it behaves. The 2.0-in.-longer wheelbase and 1.0-in.-wider track make for a more stable platform than the previous GS, which, when combined with the double-wishbone front and multilink rear suspensions, delivers improved ride comfort and a more tossable overall feel. The electronically controlled shocks adapt well to different driving styles/conditions, but switching from Normal mode to Sport degrades the ride slightly without improving the handling all that much.

Really press the Lexus and its slightly

■ The GS 430's shape is evolutionary; the previous GS was sporting, but the new car's coupe-like roofline makes it more so. The 4.3-liter 300-bhp V-8 is the weakest of the bunch (making it the slowest), though supremely smooth and quiet.

softer edge begins to show, but only just. At seven-tenths, all three cars are virtually a wash, each cornering with confidence and aplomb. But lean harder and the GS exhibits more body roll than the BMW or Infiniti and understeers more approaching the limit. It never loses its composure or feels at all unstable, its limits are just a hair lower, and as such, it's not quite as exciting to drive. The GS 430 is highly competent and no doubt fast, just not as much fun.

Contributing to this feeling of competence is the all-seeing, all-knowing Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management (VDIM) system. Serving as the centralized hub for everything from the electronically controlled brake, steering and throttle systems to ABS, brake assist and yaw control, VDIM decides when and where to intervene should the car get out of shape. It works as advertised, though perhaps too well on occasion, stepping in earlier than we'd like and before either the 545i or M45.

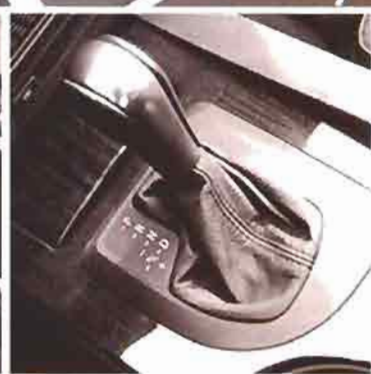
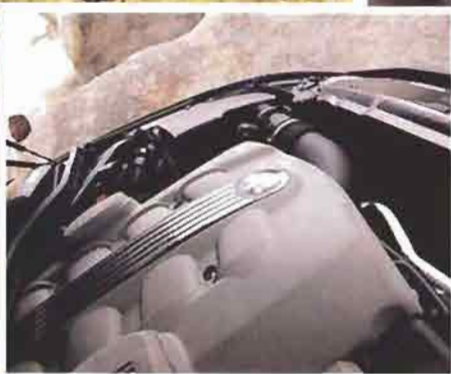
This latest Lexus finished where it did because the other two cars offered slightly better performance. The three editors who participated in this test crave speed and cast our votes accordingly. However, that is not to say other editors (or consumers) who prefer a higher level of comfort and refinement wouldn't have reversed the







■ At left, not the prettiest picture, especially if viewed against the Lexus and Infiniti. The BMW makes up for its awkward styling with the best driving dynamics of the three. The 4.4-liter 325-bhp V-8 pulls like it is far more powerful and the Steptronic automatic makes the most sense to us.



order. With the latest GS 430, Lexus has successfully built a genuine luxury sports sedan, one that delivers performance, personality and poise, all without losing its unique Lexus identity.

## 2nd BMW 545i

569.0 POINTS

After just a few hours in each of the cars, we knew this test was going to be close. We had three serious machines with three definite personalities. But as the days wore on and the miles piled up, it became increasingly apparent that the real battle would be between the BMW and Infiniti. The more performance-focused of our trio, these two seemed perfectly willing to give the Lexus a style point here or a comfort point there in exchange for an extra tenth of a second or mile-per-hour.

A quick glance at the results shows they traded points back and forth, the 545i edging the M45 in some areas, the Infiniti fighting back in others. The performance ratings are nearly dead even, while on the subjective side, the BMW pulls ahead in the driving-related categories only to lose ground for its styling, comfort and ergonomics. That said, the 545i remains the enthusiast's choice for any kind of serious road work. Of our three, it's still the fastest, best-handling and most satisfying car

to drive. But with cars like the Infiniti M45 offering a more balanced sport/luxury solution for less money, being the fastest is no longer enough.

The BMW has won many fans (and magazine tests) by possessing the traits every enthusiast requires—power, precision, balance and handling. Starting with its proven 4.4-liter 325-bhp V-8, the 545i launches down the road with authority, edging its two competitors to 60 mph (5.2 sec.) and through the quarter mile (13.7 sec. at 104.0 mph). Its engine is by far the

most flexible, accelerating fiercely from low on the tach all the way to its 150-mph top speed. In contrast, the Lexus could use more bottom-end while the Infiniti's power begins to taper off once into triple digits.

Like the engine, the BMW's 6-speed Steptronic transmission is all about putting power to the ground, banging out quick, confident shifts regardless of driving conditions. In manual mode, upshifts are performed by pulling back on the lever, downshifts by pushing forward, just like a sequential-shift race car. This approach is





different from the Lexus, Infiniti and most every other non-BMW on the planet, but during hard driving, it feels more natural.

Even without the adaptive shocks of the GS 430 or the rear active steer of the M45 Sport, the 545i still manages to school them both with well-executed chassis tuning and just a touch of its own high-tech wizardry. The wizardry comes courtesy of active steering and active roll stabilization, part of our test car's Sport package (\$3300), which also includes bigger wheels and tires, sport-tuned suspension and sport seats. Together, this combination further enhances the BMW's already solid handling and predictable at-limit manners. Its active steering takes some practice around town, but on the open road, proves the most responsive and communicative of our group.

Exceptional performance aside, the 545i stumbles in the same places as the standard 5 Series, namely its styling and interior. These are both highly subjective areas, so some may not agree, but when compared with the sculpted lines of the Lexus and the subtle muscularity of the Infiniti, the BMW comes off third best. The GS 430 in particular already makes the 545i look dated, especially when parked alongside the Lexus' clean, elegant design.

The situation isn't as serious inside, where leather, wood and matte metallic surfaces give the cabin something of an executive office feel. It's not particularly warm or coddling, but is no doubt purposeful. And despite its inherent quirks, there's no sense beating a dead iDrive horse. It's all been said before and while it's not quite the devil incarnate many would have you believe, there's no denying that even with practice, the simplest operations take too many steps. Both the M45 and GS do a much better job of combining buttons and a screen to control the car's myriad electronics.

As a pure sports sedan, the BMW still takes top honors. It remains the true driver's

■ **BMW's iDrive is easier to use in the 5 Series, though still not as intuitive as it should be.**



# ROAD & TEST

SCALE: 10 IN. (254 MM) DIVISIONS  
DRAWINGS BY TIM BARKER

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## 2004 BMW 545i

BMW of North America, Inc., P.O. Box 1227,  
Westwood N.J. 07675; www.bmwusa.com



List Price: \$55,000 Price as Tested: \$62,620

Price as tested incl std equip. (ABS, front, side & curtain airbags, yaw & traction cntrl, cruise cntrl, iDrive w/nav, climate cntrl, keyless entry, leather, power front seats, leather/wood trim, tilt & telescoping strg wheel, pwr windows, mirrors & door locks); Sport pkg (18-in. alloy wheels, perf tires, sport suspen, seats and strg wheel; active steering, active roll stabilization) \$3300, premium sound (6-disc in-dash CD changer, Logic 7 audio) \$1800, electric rear sunshade (\$575), park dist. control (\$700), folding rear seat w/ski bag (\$475), sat. radio prep (\$75), dest charge (\$695).

	<b>BMW 545i</b>	<b>Infiniti M45 Sport</b>	<b>Lexus GS 430</b>
<b>General Data</b>			
Curb weight.....	3970 lb	4010 lb	3840 lb
Test weight.....	4150 lb	4190 lb	4020 lb
Weight dist (with driver), f/r,%.....	50/50	54/46	53/47
Wheelbase.....	112.2 in.	114.2 in.	112.2 in.
Track, f/r.....	60.4 in./60.6 in.	59.5 in./60.2 in.	60.4 in./60.6 in.
Length.....	190.6 in.	192.6 in.	189.2 in.
Width.....	71.7 in.	70.8 in.	71.4 in.
Height.....	58.0 in.	59.5 in.	55.9 in.
<b>Engine</b>			
Type.....	dohc 4-valve/cyl V-8	dohc 4-valve/cyl V-8	dohc 4-valve/cyl V-8
Displacement.....	4398 cc	4494 cc	4293 cc
Bore x stroke.....	92.0 x 82.7 mm	93.0 x 82.7 mm	90.9 x 82.6 mm
Compression ratio.....	10.5:1	10.5:1	10.5:1
Horsepower (SAE).....	325 bhp @ 6100 rpm	335 bhp @ 6400 rpm	300 bhp @ 5600 rpm
Torque.....	330 lb-ft @ 3600 rpm	340 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm	325 lb-ft @ 3400 rpm
Redline.....	6500 rpm	6600 rpm	6350 rpm
Fuel injection.....	elect. sequential port	elect. sequential port	elect. sequential port
Rec fuel.....	prem unleaded, 91 pump oct	prem unleaded, 91 pump oct	prem unleaded 91 pump oct
<b>Chassis &amp; Body</b>			
Layout.....	front engine/rear drive	front engine/rear drive	front engine/rear drive
Body/frame.....	unit steel	unit steel	unit steel
Brakes, f/r.....	13.1-in. vented discs/ 12.2-in. vented discs; vac asst, ABS	12.6-in. vented discs/ 12.1-in. vented discs; vac asst, ABS	13.1-in. vented discs/ 12.2-in. vented discs; vac asst, ABS
Wheels.....	cast alloy, 18 x 8	cast alloy, 19 x 8½	aluminum alloy, 18 x 8
Tires.....	Dunlop SP Sport 01 DSST; 245/40R-18 93W f, 275/35R-18 95Y r	Bridgestone RE050A, 245/40R-19 94W	Yokohama ADVAN A10B, 245/40R-18 93Y
Steering.....	rack & pinion, vari power assist	rack & pinion, vari power assist	rack & pinion, vari power assist
Overall ratio.....	10.1-18.1:1	16.4:1	13.9-19.1:1
Turns lock to lock.....	1.8-3.3	3.0	2.7-3.2
Suspension, f/r.....	upper & lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, adj anti-roll bar/multilink, coil springs, tube shocks, adj anti-roll bar	upper & lower A-arms, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/multilink w/active rear steer, coil springs, tube shocks, active anti-roll bar	upper & lower A-arms, coil springs & elect. adj tube shocks, anti-roll bar/multilink, coil springs, elect. adj tube shocks, anti-roll bar
<b>Accommodations</b>			
Seating Capacity.....	5	5	5
Head room, f/r.....	38.5 in./36.0 in.	39.0 in./36.5 in.	37.5 in./34.5 in.
Front-seat leg room.....	44.0 in.	43.5 in.	44.0 in.
Rear-seat knee room.....	26.0 in.	28.0 in.	25.5 in.
Trunk space.....	14.0 cu ft	14.9 cu ft	12.7 cu ft



## 2006 Infiniti M45 Sport

Nissan North America Inc., Infiniti Division,  
P.O. Box 191, Gardena, CA 90248; www.infiniti.com



List Price: \$49,550 Price as Tested: \$50,760

Price as tested incl std equip. (ABS, front, side & curtain airbags, yaw & traction control, HID headlamps, cruise cntrl, dual-zone climate cntrl, AM/FM radio/6-disc CD changer, voice recognition for audio system, climate control & trip computer, keyless entry, leather interior, 10-way adj power driver's seat [6-way passengers], heated & ventilated front seats, tilt & telescoping multifunction steering wheel, pwr windows, mirrors, door locks & moonroof), rosewood interior trim (\$600), dest charge (\$610).

## 2006 Lexus GS 430

Lexus, 19001 S. Western Ave.,  
Torrance, Calif. 90509; www.lexus.com



List Price: \$51,125 Price as Tested: \$61,180

Price as tested incl std equip. (ABS, front, side, curtain & front knee airbags, yaw & traction cntrl, dual-zone climate cntrl, AM/FM radio/6-disc CD changer, cruise cntrl, leather, heated front seats, maple wood trim, tilt & telescoping multifunction steering wheel, pwr windows, mirrors & door locks), opt. pkg (Mark Levinson audio, DVD navigation, power moonroof, backup camera, park assist, rain-sensing wipers, headlamp washers, Dynamic Radar cruise cntrl, Pre-Collision system, all-season run-flat tires, rear spoiler, ventilated front seats) \$9405, dest charge (\$650).



■ The BMW's seats offer great lateral support, but lack comfort. Interior is a bit colder than in GS or M.



car, delivering the tightest handling, the most direct feedback and the biggest smiles. But throw subjective factors like styling, ride and interior functionality into the equation, and the negatives end up chipping away at the positives. For those who aren't bothered by these things, the 545i is the easy choice. But for the three of us blasting through the desert on this test, those factors did matter and ended up tipping the scales in favor of the Infiniti M45.

	BMW 545i	Infiniti M45 Sport	Lexus GS 430
<b>Acceleration</b>			
Time to speed, sec			
0-20 mph	1.1	1.2	1.2
0-40 mph	2.9	2.9	3.1
0-60 mph	5.2	5.3	5.7
0-80 mph	8.4	8.7	9.3
0-100 mph	12.7	13.3	14.3
Time to distance			
0-1320 ft (¼ mile)	13.7 @ 104.0 mph	13.8 @ 101.4 mph	14.2 @ 99.5 mph
<b>Braking</b>			
Minimum stopping distance			
From 60 mph	121 ft	115 ft	126 ft
From 80 mph	214 ft	201 ft	219 ft
Control	excellent	excellent	excellent
Brake feel	good	very good	good
Overall brake rating	good	very good	good
<b>Handling</b>			
Lateral accel (200-ft skidpad)			
	0.89g	0.91g	0.85g
Balance	moderate understeer	mild understeer	moderate understeer
Speed thru 700-ft slalom			
	66.1 mph	63.6 mph	64.8 mph
Balance	mild understeer	moderate understeer	moderate understeer
<b>Drivetrain</b>			
Transmission			
	6-speed automatic	5-speed automatic	6-speed automatic
Gear/Ratio/Overall/(Rpm) Mph			
1st.:1	4.17/14.09/(6500) 35	3.83/12.87/(6600) 42	3.30/12.44/(6200) 37
2nd.:1	2.34/7.91/(6500) 62	2.37/7.96/(6600) 68	1.96/7.39/(6200) 61
3rd.:1	1.52/5.14/(6500) 95	1.52/5.11/(6600) 106	1.35/5.09/(6200) 89
4th.:1	1.14/3.85/(6500) 127	1.00/3.36/est (5950) 145*	1.00/3.77/(6200) 120
5th.:1	0.87/2.94/est (5900) 150*	0.83/2.79/est (4930) 145*	0.73/2.75/est (5600) 149*
6th.:1	0.69/2.33/est (4650) 150*		0.58/2.19/est (4450) 149*
Final drive ratio	3.38:1	3.36:1	3.77:1
Engine rpm @ 60 mph in top gear	1900 rpm	2300 rpm	1800 rpm
*Electronically limited.			
<b>Fuel Economy</b>			
Our driving			
	17.5 mpg	16.3 mpg	17.6 mpg
EPA city/highway			
	18/26 mpg	17/23 mpg	18/25 mpg
Cruise range			
	306 miles	310 miles	313 miles
Fuel capacity			
	18.5 gal.	20.0 gal.	18.8 gal.
<b>Interior Noise</b>			
Idle in neutral			
	44 dBA	48 dBA	43 dBA
Maximum, 1st gear			
	70 dBA	73 dBA	69 dBA
70 mph			
	70 dBA	69 dBA	70 dBA

## 1st INFINITI M45 SPORT 582.5 POINTS

In just two short years, Infiniti has shaken up the sports-sedan world, first with the G35 and now the second-generation M45. A completely different animal from its predecessor, this all-new M wraps stirring performance and improved interior quality in an attractive, sporting design. It deftly splits the difference between the softer-focused Lexus and the harder-edged BMW, stealing points from each by being not only comfortable and stylish, but also fast and fun to drive.

The M45 accomplishes this enviable feat starting with a next-generation version of the G35's proven FM rear-drive platform. Larger, stiffer and engineered to accept a V-8, this much-improved chassis endows the M with a rock-solid foundation on which to build a serious sports sedan. On the road, it feels more torsionally rigid, reacting quickly to driver inputs while remaining less affected by bumps or rough surfaces. Add to that our M45 Sport model's 19-in. wheels, specially tuned shocks and rear active steer, and you have the makings of a formidable handler.





**MIKE MONTICELLO**, Associate Editor

**In My Opinion...** Every time I got into the BMW and drove it hard, I got out thrilled. Although it doesn't look the best or have a fancy-pants interior, it drives the best, which is the most important aspect to me. The steering, the handling, the unrelenting thrust of its V-8 and the intuitive nature of Steptronic (though it shouldn't upshift for itself at redline) make it my choice.

Our blasts through Death Valley confirm this, the Infiniti cornering confidently without ever losing ground to the BMW. It still lacks the 545i's trademark handling crispness and communicative steering feel, but it's by no means far behind. Around the skidpad, the M45's rear active steer helped it achieve the highest (0.91g) rating, but then it faltered in the slalom (63.6 mph), scoring the lowest of our three cars. Oddly, the M45 Sport in our February 2005 road test negotiated the same slalom with the same driver at 65.4 mph. In the real world, however, the Infiniti feels every bit as quick as the BMW and nearly as smooth as the Lexus.

Much of this quickness can also be attributed to the M45's torquey 335-hp V-8. Displacing 4.5 liters and pumping out 340 lb.-ft. of stump-pulling torque, the Infiniti's engine closely shadows the BMW's in nearly all conditions. Acceleration is consistently strong through the low-midrange, softening only slightly as it approaches redline, where the BMW continues pulling.

Excellent low-end grunt catapults the M45 out of slow corners with ease, while the exhaust note serves as a subtle reminder of its serious intentions. The stopwatch shows 0 to 60 mph taking 5.3 sec. and the quarter mile 13.8 sec. (at 101.4 mph), each just a tenth slower than the 545i.

With the only 5-speed automatic of the bunch, the wider-spaced gears force the engine to work harder at times, but the V-8's torque overcomes this in most situations. This is a non-issue in everyday driving, only coming into play at much higher speeds. On the flip side, the M45 is the only one of our three cars (and one of only a handful of cars) to automatically blip the throttle on downshifts. This not only sounds great, but like a good heel-and-toe manual downshift, helps keep the chassis



■ The M45's 4.5-liter V-8 has the most power (335 bhp) and the most torque (340 lb.-ft.) of the group. It also exhibits high limits and a forgiving nature, making it a willing back-road partner.

balanced when braking and shifting down at the same time.

The M45's overall design theme is one of purposeful elegance. It avoids the extremes of the Lexus and BMW, never straying far from the Nissan/Infiniti corporate sedan look. At a glance, the exterior could be mistaken for a G35 or even a Nissan Altima, but on closer inspection, the M's sleeker proportions grace it with an understated athleticism. It's not a look that draws attention like the Lexus or polarizes like the BMW, meaning it quietly looks good and offends no one.

The same goes for the interior, where Infiniti has made major strides in fit, finish



**KIM WOLFKILL**, Senior Editor

**In My Opinion...** I like how the M45 splits the difference between the BMW's performance and the Lexus' luxury. The engine pulls with authority, making quick bursts through traffic a breeze, while its rear active-steer-assisted chassis serves up surprisingly nimble handling that belies its 2-ton curb weight. Styling is clean without being too understated and interior quality is by far the best to ever come out of Infiniti.





# The Results...

## PERFORMANCE

Performance points based on proportional scale (normalization).

		2004 BMW 545i	2006 Infiniti M45 Sport	2006 Lexus GS 430
0-60 mph time	30 pts	30.0	29.4	27.4
0-1/4 mile time	30 pts	30.0	29.8	28.9
Slalom	30 pts	30.0	28.9	29.4
Skidpad	30 pts	29.3	30.0	28.0
Braking, 60-0 mph	30 pts	28.5	30.0	27.4
Braking, 80-0 mph	30 pts	28.2	30.0	27.5
Fuel economy, EPA	20 pts	20.0	18.2	19.5
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	200 pts	<b>196.0</b>	<b>196.3</b>	<b>188.1</b>

## SUBJECTIVE

Subjective ratings based on points awarded in each of 12 categories by editors and scored based on a proportional scale.

		2004 BMW 545i	2006 Infiniti M45 Sport	2006 Lexus GS 430
Driving excitement	20 pts	20.0	18.7	15.7
Engine	20 pts	20.0	19.4	17.8
Gearbox	20 pts	20.0	19.1	18.4
Steering	20 pts	20.0	17.8	16.6
Brakes	20 pts	20.0	18.4	17.8
Ride	20 pts	15.1	15.9	20.0
Handling	20 pts	20.0	18.7	16.6
Exterior styling	15 pts	10.5	14.5	15.0
Interior styling	15 pts	10.5	15.0	13.3
Seats	10 pts	8.6	9.2	10.0
Ergonomics/controls	10 pts	7.8	10.0	9.7
Luggage space	10 pts	10.0	9.5	8.4
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	200 pts	<b>182.5</b>	<b>186.2</b>	<b>179.3</b>
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> (400 pts) Price independent		<b>378.5</b>	<b>382.5</b>	<b>367.4</b>

## PRICE

Points based on a proportional scale; points range based on percentage of top price.

		2004 BMW 545i	2006 Infiniti M45 Sport	2006 Lexus GS 430
Price as tested	200 pts	190.5 \$62,620	200.0 \$50,760	191.7 \$61,180
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> (600 pts) Price dependent		<b>569.0</b>	<b>582.5</b>	<b>559.1</b>

## Final Standings

**2**

2004 BMW  
545i

**1**

2006 Infiniti  
M45 Sport

**3**

2006 Lexus  
GS 430



■ The angled center console of the M45 seems odd at first, but easy to use. Fit and finish are excellent, the design is fresh and the seats make long days of driving a pleasure.



and quality of materials. It's the best Infiniti cabin ever and pretty close to the Lexus and BMW. The M45's craftsmanship still gives something away to the GS, though functionally, its center control screen and associated buttons/wheel are easier to navigate than the other two. The flat angle of the console feels a bit odd at first, but doesn't take long to get used to. And for \$600, the M45 Sport's optional rosewood trim endows the cabin with a welcome elegance that's lacking in the standard metallic-finish trim.

Infiniti has definitely brought its A game to the sports-sedan ranks with a well-rounded contender that has few weaknesses. Unlike the 545i and GS 430, which both lost categories in our scoring, the M45 Sport never finished outside the top 2. It was this consistency and its distinctive mix of luxury and performance that won out in the end. It should be noted that our M45 Sport test car came equipped with few options, which is why the difference in cost to the next highest-priced car, the GS 430, was more than \$10,000. Had it been comparably equipped (navigation, premium audio, intelligent cruise control, etc.), its as-tested price would have fallen in between the Lexus and BMW. That, however, would not have changed the outcome.

At the end of the day, none of these cars disappoints. They're quick, they're comfortable and they're all fun to drive. The Lexus does what Lexuses do best. It comfortably isolates its occupants from the outside world, but now it does so with a lot more driver involvement and encouraging levels of performance. The BMW occupies the opposite end of the scale, more than living up to the company's "Ultimate Driving Machine" slogan, but also leaving too much on the table styling-wise. Which leaves the M45, the car that did most everything well, never tripped up and kept us coming back for more.