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Infiniti Q50 Road Test

Published: March 18, 2017

Author: David Miles

Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/infiniti-q50-road-test/>



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The Infiniti Q50 S 3.0 V6 turbocharged mid-sized saloon...

Assessed by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Adding lots more 'go' to its styling 'show' the Infiniti Q50 mid-sized premium brand saloon range is the new S 3.0 litre V6 twin-turbo 405 hp petrol engine with drive to the rear wheels through a standard-fit seven-speed automatic transmission.

There are many other petrol and diesel engine options in the new Q50 and its Q60 coupé sibling line-up, plus a hybrid power source. But it's the use of a new 3.0 litre turbo petrol unit that should spark interest from well-healed 'petrol-head' motorists, which since the



Infiniti brand was introduced to the UK in 2009, have shown a reluctance to move to Nissan's premium Infiniti brand. Having a relatively small dealer network hasn't helped the brand's presence on our roads either.

For the record the Q50 four door saloon range sits between their better selling Q30 five door lower medium section hatchback aimed at the company car market and the large Q70 saloon. Engine options for the Q50 are the main selling 2.2 turbodiesel and 2.0 turbo petrol units from Mercedes and this Nissan 3.0 V6 twin turbo petrol unit. There is also a 3.5 V6 petrol/electric performance-orientated hybrid which is available with two and four-wheel drive choices. Prices range from £29,320 up to £47,625.

Depending on the engine chosen, the full specification range is SE, Premium, Premium Tech, S Sport and S Sport Tech. Infiniti has just announced at the Geneva Motor Show that in conjunction with the RenaultSport Formula One Team they are exploring the introduction of Project Black S F1 inspired hybrid technology models, which could include the Q50 saloon and its sibling Q60 line-ups. Infiniti also unveiled at the Geneva Show other specification changes for the global selling Q50 due in the UK later this year, but the engine line-up remains the same.

But back to the here and now. The Q50 range is a left-field alternative to the likes of the Audi A4, BMW 3 Series and Mercedes C-Class and the Lexus IS can also be included. My test version, the new Q50 3.0 V6 405 hp twin-turbo Sport Tech, will directly compete with Audi S/RS, BMW M and M Sport and Merc's AMG variants of those model ranges. Having said those are its potential competitors price-wise, the Q50 is in fact larger at 4,800 mm (15.75 ft) in length – almost the same as the Audi A6, BMW 5 Series and Mercedes E-Class Saloons. The Q50 is good to look at, it has great kerb appeal and substantial road presence, so its price makes it good value with high equipment levels, plus seating for five adults and with a 500 litre (17.66 cu.ft) boot.



The Q50 S 3.0 turbo with Sport Tech specification test car I tried carries a price of £45,970, which for a niche model looks on the expensive side, but in fact is good value for money when you consider the performance and extensive equipment it offers.

Performance first; top speed is restricted to 155 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is just 5.1 seconds. The 3.0 litre V6 petrol engine with twin-turbos pushes out 405 hp but what makes it a potential 'road burner' is the impressive 475 Nm (350 lb.ft) of torque but that is delivered from just 1,600 rpm so the 'grunt' is excellent, giving immediate acceleration from slow speeds right through to the legal maximum speed and beyond. One of its better-than-average characteristics is that this is no temperamental high performance machine which needs the open road to excel. It copes with slow and stop-start urban traffic conditions easily, remaining docile when conditions dictate but it's a delight to drive in an enthusiastic way. Perhaps the standard fit seven-speed automatic gearbox is not its sharpest



component. Occasionally the shifts felt slow and with the Drive selector mode set in Standard there was a reluctance to change down a ratio. In Eco mode it provided really lethargic acceleration response and that mode was best used once cruising speed had been achieved. Changing to Sport and Sport Plus modes did bring the transmission to life but it was never as 'snappy' or as immediate as fast changing twin-clutch auto gearboxes.

As for fuel economy the official Combined Cycle figure is 31 mpg and during my week of test driving overall it returned 27.4 mpg - which given the busy traffic driving we have to endure was good.

With CO2 emissions of 206 g/km running costs are significant, but the latest increase in VED road tax now applies to its competitors as well. With the new VED road tax rates, which come into operation from the 1 April 2017, the First Year rate has gone up from £650 to £1,200 and the Second Year onwards rate is £140 plus an additional rate for each of the next five years of £310 because the car costs more than £40,000. Before 1 April it would have cost £295 a year for Year Two onwards. Company car drivers also see their personal tax costs in the highest 37% band. Insurance is Group 34E and warranty is a mediocre three years/60,000-miles.

The Q50 S also has Direct Active Steering, billed as the world's first 'by-wire' fully electronic active steering. It is supposed to provide smoother, more predictable steering response, and it is adjustable for steering weight. Driven in a conservative manner it worked fine enough for most users, but get enthusiastic with the car's undoubted performance abilities and the steering became unpredictable, with its variable weight loading so lacking in sharp and precise feedback on winding roads.

Riding on 19-inch alloy wheels shod with run-flat tyres the ride was on the firm side but the digital dynamic suspension dissipated the worst shocks from potholes, and generally the ride was 'firm-but-fair' for a sports saloon.



Styling wise with its sleek aerodynamic looks the Q50 attracted several comments from my neighbours and other potential customers. Most asked what it was – an Infiniti I said, but sad-to-say “Who makes that” was the response I mostly received. The lack in numbers of the brand’s UK dealerships and its low profile presence on our roads really does the Infiniti brand no favours in this country, although of course it is a global car with the USA, Far East and Asian markets being big customers.

Strong on engine performance the Q50 S 3.0 Sport Tech model is also very strong on specification. The long list of specification items is endless from sport brakes to its Safety Shield components with intelligent cruise control, lane departure warning and lane



departure prevention, blind spot warning, forward emergency braking, predictive forward collision warning, distance control and reversing collision warning. Also included are features such as Drive mode selector, Intouch connectivity, dual touch-screens, sat-nav, Bluetooth, rear view camera, 360-degree camera monitor, parking assistant, climate control, leather upholstery, BOSE sound system, heated front seats, 40/60 split folding rear seats which include a ski hatch, and so the list goes on. Suffice to say all the high spec is wrapped up in a high quality interior, with its twin cockpit design at the front, and good legroom in the rear for adults.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The facia is not as uncluttered as say the latest Audi A4 or BMW 3 Series but it has 'character' which I find appealing if rather 'old-school'. To have controls and switches easily available is better, rather than some of the sterile layouts which have become switch-free with the most-used operations having to be done through a touchscreen. I find these not user-friendly and not good for safe driving.

VERDICT

Overall this particular Q50 S is a good alternative to more common-place German rivals. The new 3.0-litre V6 engine is the pick of the range which gives 'life' to the Q50. It is certainly a left-field choice so unless you live within a reasonable distance of those rare Infiniti dealerships it not going to be easy to own one.

For: Seriously good new high performance engine, high specification, good quality interior, stylish kerb appeal, roomy, a left-field alternative choice of a premium brand high performance sports saloon.

Against: The brand's low public profile on UK roads, low number of Infiniti dealerships, high tax costs, sometimes hesitant auto gearbox, inconsistent steering responses, lacks the poise and sharpness in handling of its German rivals.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Infiniti Q50 S 3.0t Sport Tech.

Price: £45,970.

Engine/transmission: 3.0 litre, V6, twin-turbo, petrol, 405 hp, 475 Nm (350 lb.ft) of torque from 1,600 rpm, seven speed automatic, rear wheel drive.

Performance: 155 mph (restricted), 0-62 mph 5.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 31 mpg (27.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 206 g/km, VED (from 1 April 2017) £1,200 First Year Rate then £450 from Year Two for five years, BIK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 34E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000-miles.



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