

# Showdown

What happens when Lexus and Infiniti meet the world's best?

BY PATRICK BEDARD

• Millennia from now, archaeologists will dig down through the layer left by the Automotive Era, and when they finish their sifting and sorting they'll conclude, "Wow, 1990 was a showdown year in the car business."

Model-year 1990 will be looked back on as the time when *competition* finally hit the high end of the market. The same onrush of new models and new technology that enlivened the menu of low-priced automobiles in the 1980s is finally com-

ing to high-priced automobiles in 1990. Toyota and Nissan are pushing their Lexus and Infiniti four-doors into the exclusive territory of BMW and Mercedes-Benz.

What's going to happen? Easy. The market will go to the best cars. Not immediately, of course—people don't dump their present cars and loyalties the minute something better comes along. But over the years, buyers in the lower-priced markets have moved unerringly

toward the better cars. Competition has forced the laggard brands to quicken their steps or be left for dead. The same realignment will happen at the top: our choices up there will just get better and better. Competition is a wonderful thing. The customer always wins.

That brings us to the central question: What's the best luxury sedan of this new season? Again, easy. God invented comparison tests for just such questions. All will be revealed below.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID DEWHURST