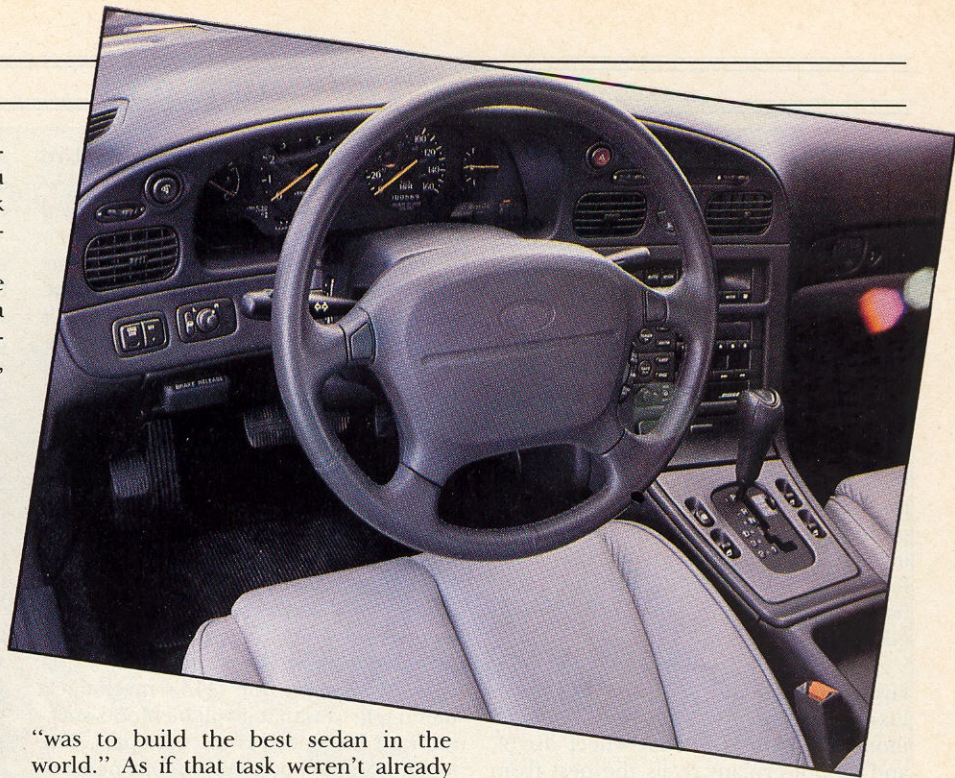


finish, and granite-like solidity is nothing more than, well, speed. Speed you can find in any Mustang V-8. To break into this heady league, you need to engineer-in poetry.

Nissan's head poet is Takashi Oka, the man in charge of the Q45 project. Oka isn't shy when it comes to stating his objective. "The goal," he says proudly,



"was to build the best sedan in the world." As if that task weren't already tough enough, Oka says cribbing from the German carmakers wasn't much help. His mouth wrinkles into a grin when he explains. "Mercedes can design cars without thinking about cost. We had to worry also about cost."

That's because Infiniti's business plan is altogether different from its German rivals'—and virtually identical to that of its counterpart in this uprising, Toyota's Lexus Division. "We don't really expect to lure very many Mercedes drivers out of their cars," states Infiniti product development manager Peter Harris. Those owners are deeply entrenched and willing to pay fat sums for the gold-plated image of Bimmers and Benzes. And everyone knows that it takes equal parts time, tradition, and engineering might to build a mystique you can bank on.

Instead, Infiniti will take another road, falling back on the strategy that's served Japanese carmakers so well in the past: build a competitive car and sell it for less—a lot less. If Nissan has it figured right—and we think it does—the new Q45 will draw most of its early admirers from the new generation: younger buyers weaned on Japanese cars who are now entering their peak earning years.

Many of these consumers feel a big Benz or Bimmer is still too rich for their blood. They're accustomed to Japanese prices and quality and will recognize the Q45's superb value for what it is. Fold in those trendsetters who lust for the newest and latest in everything, plus a few defectors from Jaguar, Volvo, Saab, and Audi, and you've got the beginnings of a movement.

None of these folks will be disappointed. The Infiniti is not just competitive in the big leagues, it excels. Excels compared to what? How about such cars as the BMW 750iL and the Mercedes-Benz 560SEL, the very best Germany can mus-

