

Lexus flagship now available in four flavors

BY JOE SAGE

The trickiest thing about the new Lexus LS is figuring out which one is for you. That's also the best thing, as it now comes every which way. The Lexus hybrid system has been applied to the LS lineup since 2006, while the Lexus F SPORT treatment has arrived in the LS for the first time this year. The basic LS 460 comes in standard wheelbase and LS 460 L long-wheelbase form. The F SPORT comes in standard wheelbase only, while the hybrid comes in long wheelbase only. Every gasoline LS 460 comes with an option of either rear-wheel or all-wheel drive, while the LS 600h L hybrid is all-wheel-drive only. Weight varies, legroom varies and fuel economy varies, as expected. The chart in our sidebar, at far right, is a good guide to the fundamentals.

Lexus is feeling pretty good about things as they bring this car to market. The company had promised us they would grow more than any other luxury brand during 2012, and as of mid-October they reported they were meeting or exceeding their goal of selling 240,000 Lexus vehicles this calendar year, experiencing an increase of more than 20 percent over 2011. Comparisons with

other brands at the end of the year will tell the final tale.

When the Lexus LS first appeared on the scene 24 years ago, in 1989, it was greeted as part revolutionary idea and part gamble, since buyers had thrown their biggest bucks at Cadillacs or German brands for years. Lexus had already been establishing its creds as a well-built alternative with Japanese reliability for a few seasons, and now it was time for a flagship in the lineup.

In addition to spacious luxury and craftsmanship, the LS over the years has brought a string of firsts, such as the industry's first 8-speed automatic transmission, first LED low-beam headlamps, first infrared-sensor climate control system, first all-wheel-drive V8 hybrid, and more.

Lexus started amping up its power and performance image in 2008 with the IS F model, then expanded that image about a year ago with the new GS F SPORT (see our Jan/Feb 2012 issue). And they've been narrowing the price of admission to the hybrid scene, notably with this past summer's ES 300h (see our Sept/Oct 2012 issue), which had brought its "hybrid premium" price differential down to about \$2700, an amount you might realisti-

cally recoup in gasoline savings. Both elements are now applied to the LS (in two different models).

At a glance, you may find the new LS looks similar to its predecessor (apart from the distinctive new Lexus trademark "spindle grille," which you would expect on any new model). In fact, they tell us that out of 6000 parts on the car—not counting nuts and bolts—over 3000 of them are new. Some you will see, some you will feel, some will make you safe and some will save you fuel, but it's a major rework, no matter how you slice it.

The new LS appears lower and wider, bearing a more athletic stance. DRLs and fog lamps are engineered from single light tubes, rather than strings of individual lights as has become common. LED taillamps suggest a 3D trio of the letter "L." The interior is conceptually divided into upper display and center operation zones, to reduce leaning, reaching and thus fatigue. Seats are more supportive, with additional bolstering, in pursuit of a more involved driving experience. Rear passengers have their own audio and climate control, and in the Executive Class package have two luxurious reclining rear seats with ottomans and a vibrating massage feature.

KEEP RIGHT >>



Bold F SPORT grilles, hybrid emblems, wheelbase lengths and a couple of model-specific colors will help you pick your own Lexus LS out of the herd.



2013 Lexus LS 600h L

SPECIFICATIONS

LEXUS LS 460, LS 460 F SPORT, LS 460 L

| | | |
|------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| ENGINE | ..... | 4.6L V8 |
| (RWD) HP | ..... | 386 |
| LB-FT | ..... | 367 |
| (AWD) HP | ..... | 360 |
| LB-FT | ..... | 347 |
| DRIVETRAIN | ..... | RWD/AWD |
| TRANSMISSION | ..... | 8-spd automatic |
| 0-TO-60 MPH | RWD |5.4 sec |
| | AWD |5.9 sec |
| MPG (EST) | RWD |16/24/19 |
| | AWD |16/23/18 |
| EMISSION CERTIFICATION | ..... | ULEVII |

LEXUS LS 600h L

| | | |
|--|-------|-----------------------|
| ENGINE (LS 600h L) | ..... | 5.0L V8 |
| Engine power (HP) | ..... | 389 |
| Engine torque (LB-FT) | ..... | 385 |
| HYBRID MOTOR AND BATTERY SYSTEM: | | |
| ELECTRIC MOTOR GENERATOR 1: | | |
| Primary generator, engine start; | | |
| permanent magnet motor, water-cooled | | |
| ELECTRIC MOTOR GENERATOR 2: | | |
| Drive wheels, regenerative braking; | | |
| 650V 221hp water-cooled perm magnet | | |
| BATTERY PACK: | | |
| Sealed NiMH, 288V, 240 cells (12 cells x | | |
| 20 modules), nickel-plated container | | |
| TOTAL SYSTEM POWER (HP) | ..... | 438 |
| DRIVETRAIN | ..... | AWD |
| TRANSMISSION | ..... | Electronic CVT (ECVT) |
| 0-TO-60 MPG | ..... | 5.5 sec |
| MPG (EST) | ..... | 19/23/20 |
| EMISSION CERTIFICATION | ..... | SULEV II |

| | | | |
|----------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| ..... | 460/F Sport | ..... | 460L/600hL |
| WHEELBASE | ..... | 116.9 |121.7 |
| LENGTH | ..... | 200.0 |205.0 |
| LEGROOM (REAR) | ..... | 35.8 |36.7 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| ..... | 460 | ..... | F Sport | ..... | 460L | ..... | 600hL |
| CARGO (CU.FT.) | ..... | 18.0 | ..... | 18.0 | ..... | 18.0 |10.1 |
| WEIGHT (RWD) | ..... | 4233 | ..... | 4365 | ..... | 4277 |na |
| WEIGHT (AWD) | ..... | 4651 | ..... | 4717 | ..... | 4695 |5115 |
| Air suspension adds 44 lb; the Executive Package adds weight, varying by model. | | | | | | | |



The 2013 Lexus LS 460 F SPORT option has its own interior finishes and performance-oriented gauges, as well as other body details and model badging.

Interior finishes include flaxen leather (as in the GS) and available shimamoku striped wood. We watched a video of the construction of a Lexus LS shimamoku wood steering wheel—which involves 67 processes over 38 days to manufacture—and concluded that the wheel alone seemed like it could be worth \$100,000 (with the rest of the car thrown in). Fine stitching and aluminum surfaces on the LS interior evoke what you get in a Rolls-Royce for a quarter to half million dollars.

Electronics are displayed on a 12.3-inch panel with a second-generation remote-touch interface. The analog clock, connected to GPS, changes as you cruise across time zones. And that large screen can present your navigation in a three-way split screen with routes, turns and phone information all at hand. Your “climate concierge” system handles ambient temperatures, as well as heated seats and steering wheel. Four-zone climate control is now joined by four-zone seats, which can heat and/or cool individually. There are two available Mark Levinson premium audio systems.

Three drive modes include Eco, Normal and Sport (with Eco maximizing fuel efficiency, and Sport amping up shift and throttle performance). Cars equipped with optional air suspension also have Comfort (with cushier suspension) and Sport S+ modes (Sport S+ adds aggres-

Interiors leave no question the Lexus LS is the brand's flagship. Shown are the flaxen leather-appointed front of an LS 600h L hybrid and the rear of an LS 460 L with Executive Class package (also available on the LS 600h L), with its reclining seats, ottomans and remote-control vibrating massage.



sive steering to Sport's shift/throttle enhancements).

Countless small details improve weight, aerodynamics and thus fuel efficiency. The LS includes tiny fins and blades on side lamps, mirrors and undercarriage, an idea that is working its way through the whole Lexus and Toyota lineups (having originated on the Lexus CT 200h hybrid). Noise is also addressed in innovative ways, such as by very clever “hollow chamber” 19-inch wheels with relief holes that relieve bump frequency pressure.

Advanced safety systems abound, involving technologies that are becoming familiar, as well as advanced Lexus “millimeter radar” and near-infrared sensors. Together, these provide blind spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, collision warning, advanced pre-collision, and dynamic radar cruise control (which even works well with crawling stop-and-go). As is the trend, these radar and infrared readings pave the way for technologies that will start to increase car-to-car communication and enable autonomous driving in coming years.

Now, just to confirm that the Lexus LS is for you, the company identifies its buyer as a “progressive leader”: affluent, powerful, pioneering and visionary. These folks live on the cutting edge of technology, fashion and design, and they don't mind rewarding themselves or displaying their achievements. And in addition to prestige, they want a dynamic driving experience. Does this sound like you? Well, grab that checkbook.

NEW LEXUS LS F SPORT

The Lexus LS 460 F SPORT (the hot red car shown at left) bears the same engine and transmission as the base LS 460, producing the same horsepower and achieving the same fuel mileage. What makes it F-sporty starts with its own look—a bolder front fascia with three-dimensional mesh grille, larger cooling ducts, a black grille surround and round fog lamps, one chrome bar along the rear bumper, and F SPORT badging. The LS 460 F SPORT is available in an exclusive Ultra White paint (as well as five other LS colors). The F SPORT has its own sporty interior, with a black Alcantara headliner, heavily bolstered seats, leather-wrapped steering wheel, paddle shifters and aluminum finishes. Appearances are backed up by sport-tuned air suspension that's lowered 0.4 inches, Brembo 6-piston brakes, 19-inch forged wheels and a Torsen limited-slip differential (on the RWD model).

It may sound like more show than go, but this is applied to a car that already achieves a 5.4-second 0-to-60 time (or 5.9 with AWD). The F SPORT option adds a look and feel appropriate to that performance.

TOP OF THE LINE LEXUS LS 600h L HYBRID

The 600h L hybrid (the long blue car shown on the previous pages) carries a lot of weight. All-wheel-drive LS models are some 400 pounds heavier than their rear-drive brethren, and the hybrid only comes in AWD (not that we're complaining—we welcome that). The hybrid only comes in long wheelbase form (here, we would pre-

fer a choice), but the long-wheelbase models gain only about 40 pounds. The hybrid battery pack is heavy (and large, reducing cargo volume from 18.0 to 10.1 cubic feet). The hybrid's 5.0L engine is larger, plus there are two electric motors. The total is almost 900 pounds heavier than a base LS 460. But all this weight doesn't slow the car down: the hybrid's 0-to-60 time beats the AWD LS 460 by four-tenths of a second, and falls only one-tenth shy of the fastest in the family, the RWD LS 460. How?

The heavy hybrid achieves such performance via a very potent hybrid drive system—438 horsepower total. And here's the tradeoff: fuel economy for the hybrid is the same as the gasoline model on the highway, just a point better combined (if comparing AWD-to-AWD) and three points higher in the city. In a sense, it has been engineered to mitigate its own disadvantages, but has in the process made its traditional advantage—fuel mileage—less of a distinction. And for all that, you end up driving a very large long-wheelbase limousine-caliber sedan with just a 10-cubic-foot trunk.

Are we saying we don't favor the hybrid? Not really. At the Lexus ES at launch a few months ago, we concluded the hybrid was the one to buy—or at least that its sales should equal those of the conventional ES. Fuel savings are there, even if not huge. And there are the halo factor and potential resale value of a hybrid. And, as already noted, Lexus sees its LS buyers as cutting edge technological visionaries. The factors that push the LS hybrid so high are surely why it ends up coming in top-trim form, as an AWD long-wheelbase luxury model. Nice halo.

CHOOSING YOUR OWN NEW LEXUS LS

The new Lexus LS lineup offers something for everyone who has the means to shop it. At the core, all four models are built around a combination of style, luxury, comfort and performance. The F SPORT adds specific performance cues that are as much about style and a particular kind of comfort as anything, on top of already sound performance. And the 600h L hybrid adds specific technologies that are carefully engineered not to compromise performance, luxury or comfort. The complete range of experience available in this one platform is striking.

For long-wheelbase models (a category shared with long-wheelbase models from BMW, Audi, Mercedes-Benz, Bentley and Rolls-Royce), the essentials of the LS are highly competitive, and specific Lexus enhancements (try out those massaging seats and ottomans) push this one even higher up the competitive scale.

The price of admission starts at \$71,990 for an LS 460 in RWD (\$74,935 in AWD). Move to the long wheelbase, and base is \$78,290 RWD (\$81,775 AWD). Nineteen different add-on packages range from \$4,740 to \$16,130 each (before you get into individual options). The new F SPORT is achieved via option packages priced at \$15,230 or higher. And the LS 600h L tops the lineup at a starting price of \$119,910. There are only two packages for the hybrid, both pricey: \$11,620 or \$12,335. The pricier package adds all those royal touches in the back seat. Add a few individual options, and you are pushing \$130,000 on the hybrid, before taxes. That is one nice Lexus. Of course, any LS is a very nice Lexus. ■



2013 Lexus LS 460 F SPORT