

supermodel

BY JOE SAGE

TALL, SLIM AND OCCASIONALLY FINICKY

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	4.6L V8 w/ dual VVI-i
TRANS	6-speed electronic sequential shift
POWERTRAIN	full-time 4WD w/Torsen center diff
POWER/TORQUE	301 hp, 329 lb-ft torque
WEIGHT	5340 lbs
TOW CAPACITY	6500 lbs
FUEL CAPACITY	23 gal
FUEL MILEAGE	15/20/17 MPG city/hwy/comb
BASE (GX460 PREMIUM)	\$58,240
• Navigation and Mark Levinson audio	\$3930
• Intuitive parking assist	\$500
• Pre-collision, drive attention, active cruise, lane departure, crawl control, smart high beams	\$3170
• Cargo net	\$64
DESTINATION	\$895
TOTAL AS TESTED	\$66,799

That subhead almost said “tall, slim and pricey,” just for fun, but it’s really not, for all you get. The defining nature of the GX to us has, though, always been that it is taller and slimmer than an LX—or so it seems. Compared to the LX, a GX is 2.4 inches shorter in wheelbase and 7.8 inches shorter in overall length. The GX is 3.4 inches narrower, but heights are actually about the same. The GX shares its platform with the Toyota 4Runner, while the LX shares its with the Toyota Land Cruiser. As Lexus luxury vehicles, the two may seem visually less distinguishable than their Toyota cousins. But when you go shopping, the distinction is clearer: the Lexus GX starts at \$53,795 and the LX starts at \$81,780.

The GX has a smaller V8: 4.6 liters versus 5.7L in an LX. The GX has 301 horsepower, compared

to 383 in an LX, and torque is 329 lb-ft vs 403. Towing capacity, however, is close to the same: 6500 pounds for a GX and 7000 for an LX.

When it comes to interior volume, there are a few surprises. Overall, the LX is nearly 25 percent larger—158.9 cubic feet versus 129.7. Both are three-row eight-seaters; however, as you balance your needs for people and cargo, you have to compare carefully. The second row in a GX folds flat, while in the LX it “tumbles,” leaving the bigger LX with 83.1 cu.ft. behind the first row, while the generally smaller GX wins this one with 91.9 cu.ft.—despite being narrower and shorter. The GX also comes out a bit ahead with two rows up and the third row down. But with all seats up, the LX wins, with 15.5 cu.ft. in the very back, against the GX’s 11.6. For a golf foursome with gear, either should work. If you’re hauling half a soccer team with gear, you just might need the bigger LX.

If you’re like most people, though, buying out of general interest and theoretical need, the cash you save by buying the GX is significant. Style,

quality and general capability will not suffer. (And you could also buy a Scion FR-S with the savings.)

The big LX weighs in at an even three tons—6000 pounds—while the GX is a sprightly 5300 pounds. This devours a lot of the LX’s greater horsepower and is also one reason the GX can hit a rated 20 MPG highway, while the LX does make it to 18 but has a city rating of just 12 MPG.

Now that we know the overall appeal of the GX, let’s check out our Premium AWD model.

Step in and sit down. The GX greenhouse is huge and rear visibility is tops—an advantage over many competing vehicles, with their rising beltlines, teardrop shapes and beefier pillars.

The GX comes with two advanced chassis features: electronic ride height control, and Adaptive Variable Suspension—a normal-comfort-sport system. Suspension was firm, solid and smooth on straight rain troughs and rough urban surfaces. In tight turns, it wallowed a bit. Bear in mind, the Lexus GX is fully off-road capable, with an industrial grade 4-wheel-low range in its transfer case.

The height feature is fairly limited—“HI” raises the vehicle 1.6 inches and “LO” brings it down by 0.8 inches, and both only at very low speeds

Lexus has done a nice job with shapes, fit, finish and materials in the GX, including door handles and grab bars, audio knobs, switches for screen functions and for sport-comfort-4WD (see next page) and other settings. The handsome audio knobs unfortunately do not provide much of a grip. An audio panel (center photo) disappears behind a retracting cover, putting the CD player and basic settings out of sight once you have them set up.

(18 and 7 mph, respectively). We might expect more height (and speed), for serious off-roading. And we might hope for it to hunker down at speed for sporty driving, but the 0.8-inch dip is described simply as useful for loading luggage.

Lexus describes the sport suspension setting as good for mountain highways, as expected, but surprisingly also for heavy loads or for unpaved roads in four-wheel-low. They specify comfort not for cushy town driving, as expected, but for bumpy roads. It’s all somewhat mysterious, but in our own considerable A-B-C testing, we found the routine ride distinctions negligible, anyway.

The GX is equipped with four-wheel ventilated



disc brakes—13.3-inch front and 12.3-inch rear—and a four-channel ABS system, plus electronic brake-force distribution and brake assist. We found the pedal feel to be very soft. Speed-sensitive rack and pinion power steering delivered well. The accelerator could be unresponsive in a pinch. Ditto the electronically controlled 6-speed automatic transmission. We could force that a bit with judicious use of the manumatic, with mixed results. Overall, we could feel all 5300 pounds.

The Mark Levinson 17-speaker surround sound audio system is bundled with navigation and the full Lexus Enform infotainment package of destination apps, voice command, SiriusXM traffic plus weather, sports, stocks and so on, all for \$3930. The cost of the audio is just part of that and therefore reasonable, but sound quality was nothing spectacular. Screen information was sparse and scattered; we'd welcome a redesign here.

The rear opens as a swing gate, not a liftgate, although the glass lifts separately. The clear floor access of a swing may appeal to some, but the door requires significant room for operation.

The midsize luxury utility segment is especially competitive. GX price and function compare

We like the clean barrel-toggle design of controls next to the shifter for Comfort-Sport, traction, height and 4WD settings. A center differential lock switch is in a completely different location; we would have put that in proximity. We would also put the indicator for Hi/Lo in proximity, rather than in an obscure location in the binnacle (center photo), following suit to two out of these four toggles that already have a button switch above them. Lexus may have the thickest owner's manuals in the business, and we spent quite a bit of time with them, in search of information on the mysteries of drivetrain settings, rear gate features and more.

well relative to its own big brother, the LX. But it's also up against solid offerings from other brands.

We drove this Lexus GX in midsummer, a 2013 model. By the time you read this, a 2014 model is likely to have been introduced. You can count on it receiving the "spindle grille" treatment that's been working its way into the rest of the Lexus lineup. The most intriguing rumor we've heard is that the base price might drop as much as \$5000. The GX already offers quite a bit for its price. With that significant a reduction, it only gets better. Meanwhile, if you shop for a remaining 2013, you should have that as a solid bargaining chip. ■

