

DIALED UP

BY JOE SAGE

ONE OF JUST 60 IN THE WORLD

Take a precision Japanese 2+2 luxury coupe like the Lexus RC (based on the IS sedan, but renamed standing for Radical Coupe), replace its engine with a 472-hp 5.0-liter V8, add all the performance bits that support that, and you have the Lexus RC F, the only full F model currently in the Lexus lineup (running \$65,875 against the base RC 300's \$42,120 or RC 350's \$45,050).

Imagine a rainy day exercise in the lab, where the RC's top engineers put their heads together and said, the RC F is pretty perfect already... best power-to-weight ratio in its class. What else could we do with it? It's only \$60-something grand, so we have headroom, but heck, it already hits 60 in four seconds. Hmm. We could lightweight it... replace some steel with carbon fiber—the hood, a rear wing, other bits—that would not only make it

lighter but lower the center of gravity, and those parts can boost aerodynamics and handling, too. Of course we can't resist upgrading brakes and exhaust from that point. Having done all that, we've already added quite a bit of distinctive style, so let's see what we can do with the interior. Maybe sport seats in red leather? And so on. Just a rainy afternoon daydream, that has now come to life.

The F in an F model's name already derives from Fuji Speedway, the manufacturer's test bed. But on this model, they spell it out: this is the Lexus RC F Fuji Speedway Edition—or RC F Fuji SE, or just RC F Fuji, for short. And special it is: there are only 60 of these in the world, including the one we recently had in our grip for a week.

Echoing the general looks of the Lexus RC F GT3 race car, the RC F Fuji loses an unspec-

ified amount of weight via its carbon fiber, and upgrades to Brembo carbon ceramic brakes (manufactured specifically for Lexus) and titanium exhaust dial up the experience. There does turn out to be a little speed boost, with the RC F Fuji hitting 60 in 3.96 versus the unmodified RC F's 4.0 seconds.

As a limited edition, the RC F Fuji comes in just two colors, Arctic Blast Satin or Cloudburst Gray (per their materials, although our vehicle sticker calls ours grey Sonic Chrome). Arctic Blast Satin is an extra-cost carwash-friendly semi-matte white running \$1875. The interior on all is Circuit Red leather with Alcantara accents, with red carbon fiber trim details added throughout. It's just the right balance of red and black—red seats, reasonable amounts on door panels, console, the bottom of the steering wheel, and a red leather arc atop the binacule cluster we thought was especially well done, just enough to remind you of



its sporting nature without overkill (and suggesting a red steering wheel when seen from outside).

The interior is very rich, a blend of luxury and spartan performance cues. Styling and design details are the kind you appreciate more every day.

They have consumed that pricing headroom effectively, creating a new machine sitting at about \$100 grand, give or take depending upon minimal options—totally in line with all it offers against its competitive set, and underscoring again what a bargain the regular RC F is.

As an amped-up supercar, the RC F Fuji is a surprisingly friendly driver around town—not overly noisy, just right, not awkward to handle, a swift and sure shifter (one of its more impressive traits) with precise, responsive steering, powerful brakes

and a firm but completely comfortable ride, from its suspension to those red sport seats.

The RC F itself is already a very strong performer, so the Fuji Edition doesn't add weight and muscle and noise to up its performance, as some superbills do—rather, it lightens up and tightens up. It's the kind of car that can make even a traffic circle a welcome highlight of your daily drive.

The RC F Fuji, though, is begging for the open road, so we gave it one good shakedown cruise in the hilly, curvy two-lanes beyond far northeast metro Phoenix, and another run up I-17 to Black Canyon City and the Rock Springs Café—the type of drives you could enjoy all day every day.

As we departed for the
(cont'd)

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Tahara, Aichi, Japan
SEATING CAPACITY	four
ENGINE	5.0L V8, 32v DOHC, alum/alum, VVT-iE variable-intelligent elec intake cam, VVT-i variable-intelligent exhaust cam
HP/TORQUE	472 hp / 395 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	12.3:1
DRIVETRAIN	RWD
TRANSMISSION	8-spd Sport Direct Shift auto w manual mode & paddles
REAR DIFFERENTIAL	Torsen limited slip (optional torque vectoring avail)
ZERO-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	3.96 sec / 168 mph
SUSPENSION	F: adaptive variable suspension, dbl wishbone w high-mount upper arms, high-rate coils w/ bound stop, ZF Sachs shocks, large-dia hollow stblzr bar; R: adaptive variable suspension; multilink w low-mount upper arms, high-rate coils w/ bound stop, ZF Sachs shocks, large-dia stblzr bar
STEERING	speed-sensitive elec power coaxial rack & pinion, F sport mode adjust
BRAKES	four-wheel power-assist disc (Brembo manuf for Lexus) w ABS, EBD and brake assist; F: 15.0 vented w 6-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction pads; R: 13.6 vented w 4-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction pads
WHEELS	F: 19x9; R: 19x10 BBS forged alum manufactured for Lexus
TIRES	F: 255/35R19 93Y; R: 275/35R19 96Y developed for RC F
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	185.4 / 107.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	35.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	36.5 / 34.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	45.4 / 27.3 in
CARGO CAPACITY	10.1 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.1 in
WEIGHT / DISTRIBUTION	(RC F) 3946 lb / 55/45
FUEL / CAPACITY	prem 91 octane / 17.4 gal
MPG	16/24/19 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$97,100
HEADLAMPS	premium triple-beam LED
NAV/AUDIO	10.3" color display, 17-spkr 835 watt Mark Levinson audio w Clari-Fi tech, Lexus Enform destination assist, Dynamic Navigation & Dynamic Voice Command
INTUITIVE PARKING ASSIST	500
DESTINATION CHARGE	1025
TOTAL	\$102,510

I-17 run, we realized we hadn't been using the drive modes around town—usually, we get into these to boost a deficit, but there is no need when base performance is so good—so we decided to give 'em a try on the longer run. A spring-loaded three-position knob pops you successively into sport or sport-plus to the right, with normal in the center (customizable with a push of the knob). To the left is eco mode, uncommon in such a car. We tried them all, finding the incremental changes seemed minimal, which to us is a good (and relatively rare) sign that normal mode isn't taking anything away and sport modes are not essential for the originally engineered experience. Modes other than normal basically fine-tune the shift map, producing subtle boosts to the exhaust note, but still none radical enough to get you banished from the neighborhood. Even eco mode surprised us with healthy shift points and great acoustics.

The inherent sporty coupe styling of the RC is a solid starting point, and the Fuji Special Edition's prominent carbon fiber hood and rear spoiler—quick ways you can hope to spot one in the wild—only make it moreso. Even if you're not the world's biggest wing fan, you'll likely admit this car looks perfect bearing one, especially when you think of its GT3 racing roots—it's not just for show, but adds to the car's extremely sure-footed go.

As with the non-Fuji RC F, this is a DSG direct-shift, rear-drive-only build—a powerful performer, tempered by precision engineering (notably including its Torsen limited-slip rear differential).

As a lightweighting exercise, the car forgoes such niceties as heated and cooled seats or dri-

ver's seat memory, though it has a full complement of tech features, from high-speed radar cruise to launch control. The car does add standard features new to all RC models for 2021, including blind spot monitor with rear cross traffic alert, heated mirrors, Apple and Android compatibility and more.

Interested? You'd better hustle. With only 60 units arriving worldwide, you're not likely to see an average of even one per state. As Lexus notes, these will be *Gone in 60 Units*. ■



ROCK SPRINGS CAFÉ

Just a half hour or so north of the I-17 and Loop 101 interchange—or you can take New River Road from the fringes of Cave Creek or Lake Pleasant much of the way, if you prefer some two-lane back road driving fun—is a spot that has welcomed travelers on the Black Canyon Trail since the 1800s.

First a military bivouac, then a stagecoach stop, the location became home to the Rock Springs Hotel and General Merchandise store, developed between 1917 and 1924 from a canvas-covered structure to the hardy building you'll find there today.

Take exit 242, Rock Springs / Black Canyon City, and double back on the west side of I-17 to find today's Rock Springs Café, serving homestyle breakfast, lunch and dinner, featuring omelettes, steak, chicken, barbecue, soups, salads and sandwiches—and more kinds of homemade pie than you knew existed—fruit pies, cream pies, nut pies, specialty pies, even take'n'bake pies to finish at home.

Everything on the menu was tempting (and we've sure been there before), but we took the waitress's advice and had "the best meal in the house," their pulled-pork version of a Reuben sandwich. She may have been right, too! The only downside was that there was no room left for pie.

That made it tempting to drive another hour and a half to Flagstaff, as long as we were out, grabbing dessert on the way back. Maybe next time. •

