

Performance is its name BY JOE SAGE

The world has long sought, or contemplated, a so-called 3-killer—a compact, rear-drive performance sedan capable of taking on the reigning German champion, at least in more clearly delineated times. Contenders have come and gone, but one standing the test of time is the Lexus IS.

So durable is the IS concept that this is only its third generation, starting back to the late '90s. The model also receives constant improvement along the way—style point refreshes and technical upgrades. Gen three, new for 2014, received just such a refresh last year, for the 2021 model year, including bolder sheet metal, updated electronics and driver assist tech, and a more rigid chassis with upgraded suspension and handling.

Available in many trim levels with multiple powertrains, a new set of F Sport Performance models at the top of the heap now rule the IS roost, thanks in large part to bearing that benchmark of the American muscle pony car, the 5.0-liter V8, this one tuned up to just a bit shy of 500 horsepower.

F Sport and now F Sport Performance are born as a Lexus version of what a number of automakers offer—an alternative to their top performance lineup, based upon a more standard build, with various style points upgraded and often with powertrains and handling beefed up a bit, to boot. With Lexus, however, the F Sport treatment has become far more dominant than a pure F build, of which there is currently a grand total of one—the

RC F coupe. This is not purely a set-aside fact, though—RC, though it bears a personality all its own, is the “Radical Coupe” variant of IS.

From there, you could deduce that Lexus chooses to go to four doors for an F Sport equivalent of the RC F, or you could conclude that F Sport is as far as they wanted to take the sedan, at that point migrating to a coupe. Same diff. It's the sedan format of the IS that puts it in 3-killer competition, while also making it quite handy as a daily driver.

The basis not only for the return of F Sport, and now new F Sport Performance—a package recognizable by various badging and black finish details—this is the first IS to bear a V8 since a full-blown IS F in latter years of the 2000s decade, during the car's second generation.

In a small car weighing in the three thousands, granted this creates a notable front-centric weight

distribution—56 to 44 percent—but with modern suspension and handling technologies, you are unlikely to care or in most cases even notice.

A quick way to spot the IS F Sport Performance from the front is the black bar along the lower edge of the spindle grille, which affects this distinctive shape noticeably and favorably, giving it an aggressive new attitude. From the rear, staggered quad exhaust outlets are a quick identifier.

Ours was a pre-production or prototype unit, so not all creature features were operational (we kind of wish you could buy any number of cars this way). Several switches, controls and interfaces seem improved, though we can't know which are final, so we won't go into detail.

The chassis and powertrain are most likely final or close to it, however (engineers will often tweak for as long as they are allowed), and the IS 500 F Sport Performance is properly the sum of its parts. Both the power and the acoustics from its V8 are glorious and, though politely aggressive right out of the box, can be adjusted to taste. We tended to favor sport mode (as set up in this early sample, at any rate) for its more responsive shifts. For an automatic, the driveline is well connected, particu-



larly with the use of paddle shift. Available individually (in ours, anyway), we also changed chassis from normal to sport, for good measure.

Call it F or F Sport or F Sport Performance (we're thinking F Sport may have stronger casual name impact than just F, anyway), if you get your hands on one of these, you are guaranteed to love it. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

BUILD	.....unitized steel body structure
ENGINE	...5.0L V8, 32v DOHC EFI, dual VVT-iE,
HP/TORQUE	.....472 hp / 395 lb-ft
ACCELERATION 0-TO-60	.....(AMCI) 4.4 sec
TOP SPEED	.....149 mph
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....12.3:1
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD
TRANSMISSION	...AA80E 8-spd auto, paddles
SUSPENSION	...F: dbl wishbone w high-mount upper arms, coils, gas shocks, stblzr bar; R: multi-link w coils, gas shocks, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....rack & pinion electric
BRAKES	.....F: 14.0 vented; R: 12.7 vented
WHEELS	.....F: 19x8.5J; R: 19x9.5J
TIRES	.....F: 235/40R19; R: 265/35R19 summer
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....187.3 / 110.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....34.2 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.51 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....38.2 / 36.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....44.8 / 32.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....10.8 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB F/R	.....3891 lb / 56/44%
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....prem 91 unl / 17.4 gal
MPG	.....17/25/20 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$61,000
PREMIUM PAINT	.....500
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1075
TOTAL	.....\$62,575

2022 LEXUS IS LINEUP

IS 300	.....241-hp 4-cyl	
	.....RWD	\$38,625
IS 300 AWD	.....260-hp V6	
	.....AWD	40,625
IS 350	.....311-hp V6	
Sport	.....RWD	43,050
Sport AWD	.....AWD	45,050
IS 500	.....472-hp V8 (all RWD)	
F Sport Performance	.....	56,500
F Sport Performance Premium	.....	61,000
F Sport Performance Launch Edition	.....	67,400