

## SPORT-ECONOMY BALANCE

BY JOE SAGE

**ES**, Lexus's midsize top-selling sedan, was new for gen seven in 2019, with a few style points refreshed in 2021. For 2022, big news is the car we are driving here—the first-ever ES 300h hybrid to also receive the Lexus F SPORT treatment.

The Lexus ES lineup has 250, 300 and 350 models, but these are not in sync with a price staircase. The 350 and 250 are priced exactly the same (see sidebar), one with a bigger engine and front-wheel drive, one with a smaller engine and all-wheel drive—for apples-to-oranges specs at apples-to-apples prices. You might want an AWD V6 or a FWD four, but Lexus is banking on having created the fewest roadblocks to a simple yes-no purchase decision.

The ES 300h, however, uses the smaller engine and simpler FWD build, keeping it close to the same prices while adding a hybrid system. Its particular advantage is notably higher fuel mileage.

Ours was a pre-production unit. Many logbook notes were about improved controls and switches—simpler options, tighter feel, firmer clicks—but these possibly included early placeholder parts.

Electronics were probably closed to complete, with nice touches such as animated graphics in the heads-up display. The touchpad continues its slow improvement from the finicky joysticks, then pads, of a few years ago, now also often able to be bypassed via the main touchscreen.

On the power side of the eco-plus-sport equation, performance felt stronger and quicker than its 215-horsepower might suggest (specs do not state a hybrid add-on). Perceptions may flatter, as zero-to-60 time is over eight seconds. Then again, the instant torque of the electric component likely does help the feel at the lower end of the curve.

The car starts up in eco mode by default, with a full-EV mode also available. There are also normal and sport modes. With high stated fuel mileage headroom, we drove mostly in sport. In addition to a no-doubt richer power curve, sport also provides a tach among the contextual binnacle instruments, always useful (even with a CVT, as on this).

We received the car with a 26.7-mpg average in

its readout, which we reset. We drove mostly in town, but with fuel mileage numbers about the same across the board, usage shouldn't make much difference. Our readouts remained similar—which means they are in the range of stated mpg for the other powertrains. We never saw 40s. Then again, we were in sport a lot, not hypermiling.

We also thought we'd see how far we could go in pure EV mode—which switched off after just a mile or two, as we hit 50ish speeds. Back at parking lot speeds, it was available again, though only briefly. Our total EV mode driving miles were just a couple, at best. Pure electric usage seems unlikely, overall, in our rapid local culture and traffic.

Pure EVs often give us an inadequately cooled cabin in summer, but the ES 300h in EV mode still

delivered effective AC on a hot day, presumably a bonus of having a liquid-cooled engine in the mix, even when not delivering power at the moment.

The F SPORT treatment is largely cosmetic, no powertrain boosts, though suspension is tweaked a bit. In the V6 350 or the AWD 250, this should be a welcome boost in handling, for the power of the one and the traction of the other. In the hybrid, it seems less pertinent—but is still nice to have. Best of all, you have the same trim options with all powertrains, with surely a distinctively cool personality factor from having a hybrid bearing an F SPORT badge and looks. ■



### SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.5L DOHC 16v with VVTiE
HP/TORQUE	215 hp / 176 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	14.0:1
BATTERY	244.8 V, 29.1 kW
HP	39 hp
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
TRANSMISSION	electronic CVT
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	8.1 sec / 112 mph
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut-type indep, F Sport tuning; R: trailing arm multi-link indep; F/R: front/rear performance dampers
STEERING	rack-mntd elec rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 12.0 vented; R: 11.1 solid
WHEELS / TIRES	19x8J split-five-spoke alloy w gloss black finish / 235/40 R19 A/S
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	195.9 / 113.0 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	na
TURNING CIRCLE	38.0 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(w mnrf) 37.5 / 37.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.4 / 39.3 in
CARGO CAPACITY	13.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIBUTION	3682 lb / 58/42%
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg 87 octane / 13.2 gal
MPG	43/44/44 (city/hwy/comb)

*This vehicle was a prototype, with no Monroney sticker. Pricing information here is assembled from media resources for model pricing, content information provided with sample, and best match of option pricing from Lexus consumer materials.*

BASE PRICE	\$45,450
PAINT: Cloudburst Gray	500
BE: intuitive parking assist w auto brake	na
GF: heads-up display	500
HL: premium triple beam LED headlights	1215
HM: power rear sunshade	210
NL: navigation and Mark Levinson 1800-watt, 17-spkr, premium audio package	*1820
OT: power open/close trunk w kick sensor	550
RF: color-keyed rear spoiler	na
WE: F Sport perforated NuLuxe-trimmed steering wheel w windshield wiper de-icer and fast-response interior heat	180
KC: key card	100
DESTINATION CHARGE	1075
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>*\$51,600</b>

\*BE: no cost info located  
 \*NL: stated \$1820 for nav option does not mention audio upgrade, so presumably should be more  
 \*RF: no cost info located  
 \*TOTAL: may be more per those missing items

### 2022 LEXUS ES LINEUP

<b>ES 350</b>	
302-hp 3.5L V6, FWD	
.....(base)	\$40,800
.....F Sport	45,450
.....Luxury	46,200
.....Ultra Luxury	49,980
<b>ES 250 AWD</b>	
203-hp 2.5L 4-cyl, AWD	
.....(base)	\$40,800
.....F Sport	45,450
.....Luxury	46,200
.....Ultra Luxury	49,980
<b>ES 300h</b>	
215-hp 2.5L 4-cyl + hybrid, FWD	
.....(base)	\$41,900
.....F Sport	45,450
.....Luxury	47,300
.....Ultra Luxury	51,080