

Though the ES we're driving here is almost identical to one we had a year ago, there is one difference in the lineup for 2023, and this sample bears that specific difference.

A full-blown Lexus F is a top performance machine, for top dollar, but they are few and far between, while an F Sport is largely a badge and trim upgrade. To some, it's a great, affordable way to get into the spirit of things; to others, it dilutes pure F models. For now, this is moot, as last year, there was only the RC F, and for 2023, there are none.

2022 was the first time F Sport was offered on the 300h hybrid. Now there are two—F Sport Design, essentially the prior F Sport, and this one, the F Sport Handling, which moves the car a bit closer to what its name may imply—a full-blown F car.

Based on a Premium Package for other trims, F Sport Design adds 19-inch wheels, special front bumper, grille and spoiler, tech and audio upgrades, power rear sunshade, panorama roof, triple beam LED headlamps and power trunk lid.

F Sport Handling adds sport-plus and custom drive modes, tuned adaptive variable suspension, aluminum trim and pedals, black headliner, and tech and comfort items. (Other upgrades of F Sport Design are available on F Sport Handling as options.)

The ES 300h bears one key trick—fuel mileage is 44 MPG combined, versus 20s for the others.

Economy is clear; power less so—just 176 horses from the engine, 39 more from the electric system, for 215 total, a 20-percent increase. Torque is unchanged. But the e-system makes its contribution straight from zero, with a full-EV mode also available for the first 30 miles or so. We never held a stopwatch to its 8.1-second acceleration time, but did repeatedly note quick performance.

There are fewer sedans of any size in the market today. The Lexus ES 300h F Sport Handling's nicely appointed, nominally midsize but spacious economy-performance mix creates a satisfying machine. If the world had just one sedan left, this would easily be a top contender. ■

TURN IT UP!

BY JOE SAGE

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Georgetown, Kentucky
ENGINE	2.5L DOHC 16v with VVTiE
HP (ENGINE)	176 hp
COMPRESSION RATIO	14.0:1
BATTERY	Li-ion 204-cell 29.1 kW, 244.8 V
HP (ELEC MOTOR)	39 hp
TOTAL HP/TORQUE	215 hp / 163 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
TRANSMISSION	electronic CVT
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	8.1 sec / 112 mph
SUSPENSION	F Sport tuned Adaptive Var (AVS); F: MacPherson-type indep; R: trailing arm multi-link indep
STEERING	rack-mount elec rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 12.0 vented; R: 11.1 solid
WHEELS / TIRES	19x8J black alloy / 235/40 R19 A/S
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	195.9 / 113.0 in
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)

BASE PRICE	\$48,835
PREMIUM PAINT: Iridium	500
HEADS-UP DISPLAY	500
HEADLIGHTS: triple beam LED	1215
SMART ACCESS KEY CARD	100
LEXUS INTERFACE: 12.3-in screen, DriveConnect w cloud nav, Hey Lexus intel assist, Destination Assist trial	1030
TRUNK OPEN/CLOSE: power, kick sensor	550
DESTINATION CHARGE	1150

TOTAL **\$53,880**

(Note: prices have increased; see chart.)

2023 LEXUS ES LINEUP

ES 250 AWD: 203-hp 4-cyl, AWD	\$42,490-51,280
F Sport Design	47,075
ES 350: 302-hp V6, FWD	\$42,490-51,280
F Sport Design / F Sport Handling	47,075 / 48,950
ES 300h: 215-hp hybrid, FWD	\$43,690-52,480
F Sport Design / F Sport Handling	48,075 / ▼ 49,985

