

Luxurious top performer

BY JOE SAGE

This big, beautiful sedan occupies an interesting spot. Lexus sits atop the Toyota-Lexus family as its luxury brand, yet in this economy, the less expensive brand may have an edge. Full-size sedans traditionally sit atop the sedan range, yet smaller ones have been the bigger sellers for years. Sedans themselves had been the default benchmark vehicle for any lineup for decades, yet have been largely supplanted by crossovers. Put it all together, and you have an absolute top dog vehicle that is produced in smaller volumes. The LS has always been desirable, and these factors of rarity may only make it moreso.

The build we are driving here—Lexus LS 500 F Sport AWD—also sits in a special spot. There are just three LS trim levels, yet as a

lower volume car, that should be plenty, and it makes the shopping and decision process easier. Though F Sport sits in the middle of the three, it's far closer in price to the base trim than to the top-dollar six-digit hybrid.

The variables do get more complex. There are only two engines in the LS lineup—a 3.4-liter twin-turbo V6 in the first two, or a 3.5-liter non-turbo V6 in the hybrid. F Sport adds bigger brakes, performance tires and variable suspension, as well as style cues inside and out, and seating upgrades. (Though arguably the catchier name, F Sport is not to be confused with a full F model, of which, with the departure of the V8 GS, there are currently none.) The LS F Sport has the same 416 horsepower as the base LS, considerably more than the

295 hp of the hybrid's V6 itself or even its combined hybrid system power of 354 hp. These add up to a zero-to-60 time of 4.6 seconds for the three, it's far closer in price to the base trim than to the top-dollar six-digit hybrid.

On top of that, the hybrid's highway fuel mileage is the same as a base rear-driver (29 mpg), though four points higher city and three more combined. Is that worth almost \$33,000 more for the hybrid? Not financially, nor really for range or convenience, as a half-gallon larger tank on the hybrid is not likely to have you stopping to refuel noticeably less often. The base or F Sport seem the far better deal.

The hybrid is also the heaviest, a full 5,302 pounds, more than 600 pounds heavier than a base LS with coil springs and RWD. Weights also vary as you choose coil or air suspen-

sion, RWD or AWD, and perhaps an F Sport Handling package to the twin turbos (adding rear steering and active stabilizer bars to certain builds). Our F Sport AWD with coil suspension still weighs about 400 pounds less than the hybrid (which is AWD and coils only).

Setup of controls and features is now completely user friendly—the screen is quick and well organized, massively improved from the painful era of center console jumpy joysticks and trackpads to now one of the best.

Ours in Atomic Silver is complemented by an interior of Circuit Red leather and Naguri aluminum trim, a well suited combination for stately status outside and a reminder of your hot possibilities within.

And hot this big sedan is, from its 416 twin-turbo horses right on through. The engine is fabulously powerful and smooth, the transmission seamless and drop-free, its all-wheel drive transparent and uniform (varying from almost 70 percent rear on dry roads to almost

a perfect 50-50 when slick). The drive experience overall is of a rock solid heavyweight and nimble magic carpet, all in one.

We did turn off a very active lane-keeping feature, which at first we took for a disconnected steering feel, but this change solved everything. And we did notice just one very harsh speedbump, which interests us possibly in the air suspension (just \$1400)—we'd have to try both in succession.

Our time was spent in the northern regions of metro Phoenix—a combination of freeway time, surface streets and near-rural two- and four-lanes. Though a large car, the LS maneuvers easily, turns tight, and meets and conquers any of the fast-changing challenges and opportunities of busy highways. Quite impressive. It can do all this in eco mode, too, providing surprisingly high fuel economy.

Even in this era of SUVs, the Lexus LS remains by all rights a true flagship. The LS F Sport is a top luxury cruiser, all sported out. ■

As their \$80-115,000 or so luxury flagship, the Lexus LS is inherently a lower-volume vehicle. As such, it has not yet received the front sheet metal restyling that we've seen on others—evolving the longstanding spindle grille to what they call the spindle body, or we call a sharknose—but if and when it does, it should look especially sharp.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Tahara, Aichi, Japan
SEATS	five
ENGINE	3.4L twin-turbo V6, 24v DOHC, Dual VVT-i, EFI D-4ST dir inj, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	416 hp / 442 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.478:1
TRANSMISSION	10-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	AWD
0-100 / TOP SPEED	4.6 sec / 136 mph
SUSPENSION	F: high-mount multi-link; R: multilink; (air suspension available)
STEERING	vehicle speed-sensing elec power rack & pinion
BRAKES	(F SPORT) F: 15.7 vented w 6-piston opposed alum calipers, normal brake pads; R: 14.1 vented w 4-piston opposed alum calipers, normal brake pads
WHEELS	20-in alloy dark vapor chrome
TIRES	(F SPORT) F: 245/45R20 summer, R: 275/40R20 summer
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	206.1 / 123.0
GROUND CLEARANCE	(coil susp) 5.9
TURNING CIRCLE	(AWD) 39.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(pano rf) 36.8 / 36.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.0 / 38.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	16.95 cu.ft
WEIGHT	(F SPORT, coil susp) 4839 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	premium unl / 21.7 gal
MPG	(AWD) 17/27/21 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$83,235
HEADS-UP DISPLAY	1220
AUDIO: 23-spkr Mark Levinson Surround Sound	1940
PANORAMA GLASS ROOF	1000
(BUNDLE): cargo net, trunk mat, wheel lock, key glove, rear bumper appliqué	420
DESTINATION CHARGE	1150

TOTAL \$88,965
Prices have increased; see chart.

2023 LEXUS LS 500 LINEUP

	RWD	AWD
LS 500	\$77,385	\$80,635
LS 500 F SPORT	80,985	84,235
LS 500h Hybrid		113,485

