

Road beat: Lexus SUV redefines luxury



The Lexus LX570 is luxury built into a heavy-duty SUV. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It would be doubtful that anyone spending almost \$90,000 for an SUV would then test it by driving it directly to and over the Rubicon Trail, although with all its systems and super trick suspension it would not be out of the question. But that first scratch would be a killer. But there is little question that the LX would conquer the Rubicon with ease and comfort.

LX570 is a super luxury SUV sharing its platform with the slightly lesser expensive (about \$10k) Toyota Land Cruiser. But sheet metal on the LX is exclusive to the LX, although the

shapes are similar. Outside the LX570 has the L'finesse design cues in its front end, but it is otherwise a large upright two-box design. Lexus has done a marvelous job instilling the L'finesse DNA in all of its designs that are now instantly recognizable as a Lexus. The new LX570 has a tasteful, conservative, but yet very elegant appearance. It would be quite welcomes at the opera.



Front or back, the seats are comfortable.

Size-wise, the LX is an oversized midsize SUV with a 112.2-inch wheelbase. But its length and width approach full size at 197 by 78 inches. It stands 76 inches with the roof rack, which appears to be standard equipment. That size is transmitted to the super luxurious interior.

Powering this 6,000 pound ground attack vehicle is a monster motor by today's standards, a 5.7L DOHC 32 valve long stroking V-8 that pumps out 383 hp at a low 5,600 rpm along with 403 pounds of peak twist at a moderate 3,600 rpm. Meaning that at that low rpm the engine is producing 276 hp. All four wheels are driven all the time via a six speed auto cog-swapper. It does have a two speed limited slip Torsen center differential and its trick electronic systems perform the job of effectively locking them up in critical situations. Unless it's a 90-degree slope, the LX is going where it's pointed.

Performance is excellent and in fact the LX is downright quick

with a 0-60 mph elapsed time of just 6.89 seconds. Passing times are also quick with a 50-70 mph simulated pass of 3.59 seconds and an uphill simulated pass of 5.28 seconds. The LX gets it done. Throttle response is very strong.



Specifications

Price \$82,690 to about \$90,000

Engine

5.7L, DOHC, 32 valve V-8 383 hp @ 5,600 rpm

403 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 3,600 rpm

Transmission

Six speed electronically controlled automatic

Configuration

Longitudinal front engine/all wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 112.2 inches

Length 197.0 inches

Width 77.6 inches

Height 75.6 inches

Ground clearance 8.9 inches

Track (f/r) 64.6/64.4 inches

Weight 6,000 pounds

GVWR 7,385 pounds

Weight Distribution (f/r)

51/49 percent

Towing capacity 7,000 pounds

Fuel capacity 24.6 gallons

Cargo capacity third row removed, second row folded 83.1 cubic feet

Turning circle 38.7 feet

Steering lock to lock 2.4 to 3.4 turns (at below 6mph)

Wheels 20X8.5 inch alloys

Tires 285/50 HR mud and snow

Coefficient of drag 0.35

Performance

0-60 mph 6.89 seconds

50-70 mph 3.59 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 5.28 seconds

Top Speed Electronically limited to 137 mph

Fuel economy EPA rated at 12/17/14 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 15.5 mpg in rural country driving and 20 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

On the flip side, the LX is remarkably economical. EPA rates it at 12/17/14 mpg which is nothing to write home about. However, this is a full time AWD vehicle that weighs 6,000 pounds at the curb with lots of hp. In reality, the big Lexus averaged 15.5 mpg overall including all acceleration tests (at least 20 full throttle applications) in 250 miles. But get it on the highway with the cruise control set at 70 mph and it will return 20.4 mpg. Not that bad considering that a vehicle like this from 30 or 40 years ago would be lucky to achieve 10

mpg and 15 mpg on the highway. Part of the big LX magic comes from its very low coefficient of drag of 0.35, meaning this is one slick barn door going through the wind. Fuel capacity is almost 25 gallons. And if you are spending \$90k to buy it, gasoline cost would be considered dime wise and dollar foolish.

But there is even more praise to be laid on the big SUV. Suspension is state of the art double wishbone and a four link live axle in the rear with coils in all four corners. However, it also has an electro-hydraulic controls with height control and automatic load leveling Adaptive Variable Suspension. Track is a wide 65 inches and the variable ratio hydraulic steering works from 2.4 to 3.4 turns lock to lock. And last but certainly not least are the wheels and tires with super wide 285/50X20 series tires mounted to 20 x 8.5 inch alloys. To put that in English, each tire puts nearly 10 inches of rubber (width) on the road and that's a lot of grip. Consequently the LX changes direct with stiction and power that is surprising. When the road bends, no problem as the LX precisely follows directions input into the steering wheel. You would think heads would toss and there would be extreme body lean, but you can forget about it. This LX is amazing when it comes to changing directions.

Ride quality is extremely quiet and solid, damping out all road imperfections quite remarkably. There is no float or bobbing and weaving, something you might expect of a vehicle this heavy and large with a ground clearance of nine inches. It is a wonderful ride. The engine turns a very low 1,700 rpm at 70 mph and there is no wind and road noise making the super trick Mark Levinson sound system extra special. Music never sounded this good.

LX has four huge ventilated discs with all the braking acronyms. They are powerful stopping the big LX in 42 feet from 40 mph. Those huge tires also help big time. Safety is everywhere starting with a strong ladder frame, vehicle

stability control, active traction control, hill decent control, adaptive front HID lighting (turns night into day), and at least 10 airbags, but if you count roll sensing the front and rear sensing airbags as two, then there are 14 (one for each row of seats). It also has a wide view front camera along with parking assist.

Inside is the luxury you would expect from a nearly \$90k ride. My tester had the \$1,510 extra luxury package which means the skins are semi-aniline, super soft leather and are gorgeous and sublimely comfortable. Of course they are heated and cooled and the second row seating being also heated. The interior feels more like a traditional English study with big overstuffed leather chairs, a fireplace and lots of polished wood. With the Mark Levinson comes a superb movie theater for the second and third row passengers. Limousines don't compare.

Total interior volume is almost 160 cubic feet, with still about 16 cubic feet available with the rear seats up. Pricing starts at \$81,780 plus \$910 for the boat from Japan. My tester had every option bringing the price to \$89,555 all in. It will criss-cross the United States with or without paved roads.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.