

Road beat: Lexus GX460 – a luxury ride



The Lexus GX460 is worth the price. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Most motorheads know that the majority of Lexuses are clean sheet of paper designs. However, there are a couple of SUVs that are heavily revised versions of a Toyota chassised vehicles, the LX570 tested recently and the GX460 tested here.

Starting with the 4Runner chassis, the GX460 begins its recreation. Its body is completely different, as well as its powertrain. About the only shared mechanical feature is the center differential ratio and even that unit may have some differences. Otherwise about the only shared dimension is the midsized wheelbase of 109.8 inches.



Specifications

Price \$39,000 to about \$42,000 (Trail Premium)

Engine

4.6L DOHC 32 valve V-8 301 hp @ 5,500 rpm

327 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 3,500 rpm

Transmission

Six speed electronically controlled automatic

Transfer case (switchable locking)

Full time AWD with low range (2.566 reduction) Center locking differential

Configuration

Longitudinal mounted front engine, all wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 109.8 inches

Length 192.1 inches

Width 74.2 inches

Height 73.8 inches (with roof rack)

Ground clearance 8.1 inches

Weight 5,340 (4X4 Trail) pounds

GVWR 6,600 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)
52/48 percent
Track (f/r) 62.4/62.4 inches
Steering lock to lock 3.0
turns
Turning circle 41.4 feet
Fuel capacity 23 gallons
Cargo capacity 64.7 cubic
feet
Wheels 18X7.5 inches
Tires P265/60X18
Tow capacity 6,500 pounds
Coefficient of drag 0.35
Performance
0-60 6.99 seconds
50-70 3.91 seconds
50-70 uphill 5.66 seconds
Top speed Who cares? It will
cruise effortlessly, quietly
and smoothly well above all
legal speed limits in the
United States. But it is
electronically limited to
110 mph.
Fuel economy
EPA rated 15/20/17 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 18 mpg in rural
country driving and 23.0 mpg
on the highway at legal
speeds

While the 4Runner may have rugged, squared off defined muscle, the Lexus receives its le finesse treatment of sophisticated creases, smooth window lines, and more subtle lean muscle that combines with the Lexus theme grille treatment and signature. Length is 192.1 inches, while its breath is 74.2 inches. It

stands 73.8 inches tall.

With the down size from the gargantuan LX570 to which the GX shares little if anything, comes a smaller version of the 5.7L V-8 engine. The 4.6L DOHC 32 valve V-8 punches out 301 hp at a low 5,500 rpm plus 329 pounds of twist also at a low 3,500 rpm meaning that at peak torque rpm you are producing 220 hp. That's strong for a 4.6L engine. By comparison, the 4Runner with its 4.0L 270 hp V-6 makes much less twist (278 pounds) at a much higher rpm (4,400). And while the 4Runner weighs in at nearly 600 pounds less, the GX460 has a bit better acceleration while giving up almost nothing in fuel economy. And then there is the intrinsic feel of a V-8, nothing is smoother and the torque curve feels bottomless. And V-8s have a sound that is the sweetest music in motordom. You just can't get that from a V-6 or inline four. The only thing close is a flat six.

Perhaps part of the extra performance is due to the GX's six speed auto cog swapper compared to the 4Runners auto five speeder, but whatever the reason the GX will git'er done with 0-60 mph runs of 6.99 seconds. Passing performance is excellent as well with a 50-70 mph level simulated pass just taking 3.92 seconds and an uphill run requiring 5.66 seconds. By comparison the 4Runner numbers while still very good are 7.78, 3.98 and 5.78 seconds respectively. The only significant difference is in the 0-60 mph run. That demonstrates the importance of more tranny speeds.

Now here is where it gets interesting, fuel economy. The Lexus weighs significantly more and has a larger, more powerful engine with two more cylinders, yet it returns essentially the same fuel economy with more performance. Yes, the EPA rates it lower than the 4Runner at 15/20/17 mpg city/highway/combined but it returned 18.1 mpg overall and at 70 mph on a level highway in a two-way run the GX achieved 23.0 mpg. Coefficient of drag is a low, for an SUV, 0.35. The 4Runner's numbers were 18.5 mpg and 23.5 mpg. Almost identical. The GX turns a silent

1,750 rpm at 70 mph. That is sweet. Even sweeter is the mammoth 23-gallon fuel tank.

In the suspenders department, the front set up is state-of-the-art double wishbone, coils and a stab bar but out back in the Luxury model test vehicle is an adaptive variable set up (still using a highly articulating solid axle) with adjustable height control on the rear set up. Steering is a power rack with three turns lock-to-lock. Turning circle is a bit wide at 41 feet. On center feel is perfect and it does the twisties with good cornering power and here's why. Track is a wide 62.4 inches and its 18 x 7.5 inch alloys are shod with wide 265/60 series tires.

When pushing the GX in tight twisties it was easy to get the Vehicle Stability Control to intervene and with it switched off its flat attitude would allow for easy rotation around the center point of the vehicle. You might find the steering a bit heavy, but it has good feedback. Turn-in is reasonably crisp considering the series 60 tires. There are a lot of comparisons reported here between the GX and the \$runner. This is one area where there is little comparison. The GX is at a whole other level.

Ride quality is superb. While it is firm, it absorbs bumps and dips beautifully while muting all road imperfections perfectly, just like its bigger brother the LX. The ride also feels better damped than the 4Runner. It has an incredibly solid feel made more apparent by how quiet the ride and interior is. Wind, road, engine and tire noise are obliterated. Even makes the optional Mark Levinson sound system maintain its concert hall quality.

Braking is by four wheel ventilated discs and it shares the same braking system with the 4Runner and it stopped in the same 44 feet while carrying 600 pounds more avoir du pois. Of course it has every braking acronym in the book as well as all the traction and handling acronyms. In addition GX has

controls for ride height, hill descent and more. It is amazing. LED low beam headlights turn night into day and ten airbags should also float your boat.



Handling is superb.

Semi-aniline leather will cuddle and comfort you and all materials are of the best quality. Lexus has left nothing out to create an air of sublime quality. Its interior is large with limousine proportions for five with two somewhat adequate seats in the third row. GX has complete and extremely clear instrumentation with all the bells and whistles. It doesn't get any better. Everything has an exquisite, luxury touch like armrests, door paneling and center console.

The price of admission is not cheap with a starting price for the Luxury edition of \$60,715, plus \$910 for the boat from Japan. This vehicle's only option was the \$1,145 Mark Levinson premium sound system. That's it. But when you look at plain Jane compact cars costing \$20k plus, maybe it's not that high. You get what you pay for and with the Lexus GX. It's a lot of quality and luxury, never mind its outstanding all around performance and features.

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.