

# Road beat: Plenty of reasons RX350 a top seller



Gas mileage is one of the disappointments with the Lexus RX350. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

2015 marks the sixth year for this third generation Lexus RX350. Why fix what isn't broken? And it's not me, the public knows, too, as the RX remains the best selling of all Lexus models. And it seems that Lexus hasn't rested with continually refining this ride. It has been nearly six years since an RX resided in the my garage and while the vehicle has not physically changed as all chassis and body dimensions has remained the same down to the tenth of an inch, the vehicle impressions have. It subjectively feels significantly more refined, smoother, quieter and more comfortable so much so I noticed it the first time I sat in the front seat. Wow, it was that good.

RX is a smaller mid-size luxury SUV with an overall length of 188 inches and a wide beam of 74 inches which gives an interior impression of a big vehicle as shoulder room is 58 inches. Its sleek proportions give the RX a rakish low look, but it actually stands 66-inches tall without the roof racks. You can't miss the L'finnesse front end and styling clues so you know it's a Lexus at your first glance. The long, high strong belt line shoulder is still with us, which was the most significant body change from generation two to this generation three. It's a shape that has held up well for over ten years. Co-efficient of drag is a low 0.33.



### **Specifications**

Price \$41,880 to about \$55,000

Engine-conventional

3.5L DOHC 24 valve V-6 270 hp @ 6,200 rpm

248 ft.-lb. of torque @ 4,700 rpm

### **Transmission**

Conventional six speed automatic

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive/all wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 107.9 inches

Length 187.8 inches  
Height 66.3 inches  
Width 74.2 inches  
Weight (AWD) 4,343  
Track (f/r) 64.2/63.8 inches  
Ground clearance 7.3 inches  
GVWR 5,650 pounds  
Tow capacity 3,500 pounds  
Weight distribution (f/r)  
58.6/41.4 percent  
Fuel capacity 19.2 gallons  
Cargo volume (second row  
up/second row folded)  
40.0/80.3 cubic feet  
Seat belts (passenger  
capacity) 5  
Wheels (std/opt)  
18X7.5/19X7.5 inch alloys  
Tires (std/opt)  
235/60X18/235/55X19  
Turning circle 40.0 feet  
Steering lock to lock 2.79  
turns  
Coefficient of drag 0.33  
Performance RX350 AWD  
0-60 mph 6.30 seconds  
50-70 mph 3.59 seconds  
50-70 mph uphill 4.66  
seconds  
Top Speed Electronically  
limited to 112 mph  
Fuel economy EPA rated at  
18/24/20  
city/highway/combined mpg  
(AWD). Expect 21 mpg in  
rural country driving with  
some stop and go and 25 mpg

on the highway at legal speeds.

Powering the RX350 is the same engine for the last 10 years when the 2007 model was introduced in 2006. Power production has essentially remained the same as this 2015 model achieves 270 hp at 6,200 rpm and peak torque of 248 pounds is achieved at 4,700 rpm meaning the engine at 4,700 rpm makes 222 hp. At 6,200 rpm, which is the engine's peak hp rpm, the engine is producing 229 pounds of torque. In spite of the loss of 20 pounds of torque at 6,200 rpm, the engine is cranking out significant more power and better performance (48 more hp). While torque curves are important, vehicle performance is all about hp.

My AWD tester had slightly improved performance even though peak hp is off by 5 hp and torque is down by 8 pounds. Zero-60 mph averaged an almost world class time of 6.30 seconds. Passing performance is also reflective of the 0-60 time as the RX was able to run from 50-70 mph on a level highway in 3.59 seconds while the same performance parameter up a six percent grade slowed that time to 4.66 seconds. My last tester had times of 6.56, 3.42 and 4.90 seconds respectively. The RX gets it done.

While the RX is a superb over the road vehicle and although it has an EPA rating of 18/24/20 mpg city/highway/combined, I was expecting much better. Don't. At 70 mph on a level highway it achieved 25 mpg. Overall the number was 21.2 mpg. Decent but more is better. But on the other side the RX returned a very good 25.8 mpg in a round trip from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe. I had almost no traffic, only made about half a dozen full throttle passes in the passing zones and averaged 58-59 mph when the speed limit was 55 which was most of the time although speeds were correspondingly higher when the speed limit was 65 mph.

Suspension is state of the art with front MacPherson struts

and a double wishbone system in the rear. Steering is a quick electric rack that is 2.79 turns lock to lock. Wheels are 18X7.5 inch alloys shod with 235/60 series tires. Sure you might hear complaints of slightly numb steering, but the reality is the RX handles well with good cornering power. Do the twisties at eight-tenths and you will be surprised how well the RX acquits itself. It takes some attention but you can feel the tires working telling you what is going on. It will surprise you. Body roll is well controlled for an SUV.

Ride quality is excellent, period. It is extremely quiet and smooth, like you're in a Lexus LS460. It feels like a bank vault, bumps just don't upset this ride or the occupants. The engine spins 2,200 rpm at 70 mph; I would like to see 2,000 and maybe a bit better highway mileage. There is no head tossing either.

Safety in the RX is all inclusive with about every safety feature and acronym thought of by man. The four-wheel discs (front ventilated and 13 inches) stop the RX in 42 feet from 40 mph. HID headlamps plus LED fog lights were superb. Ten airbags are standard.

Inside is another magnificent interior from Lexus. First the seats are amazingly comfortable with soft leather, sublime support and perfect foam densities. Just sit in one and you will get it. Rear seating is good for three. For such a small vehicle cargo capacity is large with 80 cubic feet behind the front row and 40 cubes behind the second row. Total interior volume is 140 cubes or 20 cubes more than your average EPA large vehicle.



A smooth, comfortable ride.

Instrumentation is excellent, with a large speedo and tach plus the necessary ancillary gauges. A trip computer is located in between. The center stack has easy to use A/C controls (but no apparent A/C compressor shut off). However, the media and other controls require the use of a dreaded mouse. If only my cat could eliminate it. It is distracting and not as precise to use as a push button. In an otherwise almost perfect vehicle, the mouse interface is annoying and bothersome. And Mickey and Mighty use to be two of my favorites characters. Maybe we should blame Walt Disney and Paul Terry for the mouse.

The quality of the interior materials and fit and finish also warrant special mention. They are outstanding.

While my fully loaded AWD tester that included a rear seat movie theater stickered at \$54,340 including \$910 for the boat from Japan, a base RX FWD starts at \$40,970. AWD is a \$1,400 premium. Buy the AWD model. Additionally I would add the Premium package of leather, blind spot monitor, one touch moon roof and more for \$2,760. If you have kids and need the movie theater and NAV, that will add another \$4,060. Things like power front seats, power tilt telescoping wheel and wood trim are all standard. Even the standard radio features great sound and XM satellite. This is a great ride. Drive it and you will understand why it's Lexus' most popular model.

*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.*