

Road beat: Lexus crossover SUV worth a drive



The Lexus NX-200 is full of power. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It is not unusual for Lexus to go parts bin shopping in the Toyota factory when it develops new product, as the new Lexus NX200t is an example. It doesn't mean the result is a gussied up Toyota RAV4 upon which chassis the NX is based. About the only shared parts in the NX's case is the basic chassis demonstrated by their shared wheelbase of 104.7 inches. At that point all similarities end.

Even the new twin scroll turbocharged inline 2.0L four-cylinder engine is all new. Of course it's a 16 valve DOHC unit that knocks down 235 horses between 4,800-5,600 rpm while pounding out 258 pounds of twist between 1,650 to 4,000 rpm.

Actually, even at 4,800 rpm which is peak hp, the engine is still making 257 pounds of twist, so the torque curve is basically flat to peak hp which continues for another 800 rpm. That is a beautiful power curve, perfectly linear, although in reality you can feel the boost come on strong. A six-speed torque converter automatic does the cog swapping, that sometimes seemed a little too eager to hunt for gears.



Specifications

Price \$34,480 to about \$45,000 plus \$925 for destination

Engine

2.0L DOHC 16 Valve turbocharged inline four 235 hp @ 4,800-5,600 rpm
258 lb-ft of torque @ 1,650-4,000 rpm

Transmission

Six speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Transverse front engine/
FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 104.7 inches
Length 182.3 inches
Width 73.6 inches
Height 64.8 inches

Track (f/r) 62.2/62.2 inches
Ground Clearance 6.9 inches
Weight (fwd/awd) 3,940/4,050
pounds
GVWR (fwd/awd) 5,090/5,200
pounds
Tow capacity 2,000 pounds
Fuel Capacity 15.9 gallons
Cargo capacity (second row
up/down) 17.7/54.6 cubic
feet
Wheels (std/F Sport)
17X7/18X7.5 inches
Tires (std/F Sport)
225/65X17; 225/60X18;
235/55X18 (summer tire)
Steering lock to lock
2.68 turns
Turning circle 37.4 feet
Co-efficient of drag 0.34

Performance

0-60 mph 7.33 seconds
50-70 mph 3.96 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 5.46
seconds
Fuel economy EPA rated
22/28/25 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 29-30 mpg on the
highway at legal speeds and
26 mpg in suburban driving.

Outside is a slick body done in the L'finesse theme that is well proportioned and edgy. And it is slick with a low 0.34 co-efficient of drag. Not being a fan of the Lexus themed grill, that is the only negative with respect to the overall design, but that's just one man's opinion. I still like its

overall appearance and is quite trendsetting as you will see in its competition from Infiniti.

As a compact crossover utility vehicle length is just 182 inches but it stands with a muscular width of 74 inches which masks its tall 65 inches of height. Ground clearance good at 7 inches.

Performance is very good for this FWD version notwithstanding its 3,940 pounds of curb weight. Zero to 60 mph requires just 7.33 seconds. Passing performance is also very good with a 50-70 mph run took just 3.96 seconds while the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slows that time by exactly 1.5 seconds to 5.46 seconds. Throttle response has just a bit of turbo lag, but once at full boost (perhaps a delay of a tenth of a second or two), the acceleration hits pretty hard. The overall (performance) driving experience is very good. Torque is well controlled to the point of not being an issue.

For a crossover CUV fuel economy is near excellent. While the EPA rates this FWD version at 22/28/25 mpg city/highway/combined, the NX does at least 10 percent better. On the highway at 70 mph the NX averaged 32 mpg. On a two way Placerville to South Lake Tahoe run the NX averaged 28.3 mpg and overall mpg was 26. No guilt here.

Since my tester was the upgraded FWD F Sport it came with F Sport tuned sport suspension and one inch bigger 18X7.5 inch wheels and F Sport summer tires (235/55 series). Basic suspension is already a state of the art MacPherson strut affair up front plus a trailing link, double wishbone set up in the rear. Good stuff. There is a premium cost of \$2,100 for the F Sport, but it does give the NX sharp handling, especially if you compare it to a RAV4. Sure it may not be the epitome of performance and handling, it is the epitome of polish and I am not talking about the paint finish, which by the way also happens to be exquisite. Steering is extremely quick with just 2.68 turns lock to lock and its turning circle

is reasonably tight at 37 feet. In the twisties, the NX is perfectly at home with good steering accuracy, well controlled body roll and oodles of cornering power. It is a sporty drive.

Ride quality is very smooth and on the firmer side. About the only intrusion is the summer tires on coarse roads, otherwise it is Lexus quiet. Some drivers might find the NX a bit firm, but for those drivers who like driving the ride quality is thoroughly enjoyable. The engine spins a slow 2,000 rpm at 70 mph.

With its four-wheel disc brakes (front ventilated) it stops from 40 mph in 41 feet which puts it in the benchmark class. Eight air bags, standard backup camera, ABS, traction control, VSC and more come standard. About the only major items missing from my test ride were the options of blind spot warning and lane departure warning.

Now to perhaps the best part, the interior. Seat design was trick, beautiful and comfortable. Opening the door should be an impressive experience and with the NX, it is. Materials are all of Lexus quality, even the seats were done in NuLuxe (their name) that was so good, I assumed it was leather. It was that good. Real leather is an option.

Full instrumentation (tach and speedo) is laid out in a sporty fashion just enhancing the whole package. About the only interior issue is the Lexus mouse system, it makes simple things too complicated. Rear seating for two is roomy, less roomy for three. There is still almost 18 cubic feet of cargo volume behind the rear seat and when folded flat your Home Depot space grows by almost 40 cubes to about 55.

The price of admission is under \$35 large. Add 2,100 for the F Sport and its "F" badges plus \$925 for the boat ride from Japan. Standard equipment includes even a power driver's and passenger seats, dual zone A/C. In other words, the base car comes extremely well equipped as it is a Lexus. My ride had

about nine options like a Q-Compatible wireless charger for \$220. Buy it as it eliminates wires. Two of the major items were an \$1,100 tilt and moonroof and a \$2,140 Nav Package which includes an improved audio system. I have never been in a Lexus that even with the standard audio didn't sound like Carnegie Hall. Total for my tester was \$43,230 all in.

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.