

Road beat: Lexus RX 350 keeps delivering



Lexus RX 350 continues to be a standout with each new model. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

2016 marks the new Lexus RX 350. And it is almost all new, as about the only carryover is the 3.5L V-6 and even that has changed with more horsepower. Styling has improved in an evolutionary manner. If it looks sleeker, it is as it is 5 inches longer (192.5) and rides on a 2-inch longer wheelbase (110 inches).

But what makes the RX is the extended window line carrying it to the nicely shaped rear window and hatch. It's a great look; the best yet for the RX, as the stance is a bit wider by half an inch as well. About my only dislike is the L'finesse

grille. It doesn't work for me. Its best face is a rear quartering view. Then again, what do I know?

While the 3.5L V-6 carry's over, the ubiquitous 2GR-FKS, Lexus engineers have found another 25 hp and about 20 more pounds of twist with a new rating of 295 hp at 6,300 rpm and 267 pounds of twist at 4,700. But it is now connected to an eight-speed automatic tranny instead of a six-speeder. But with eight gears it seems to be sometimes hunting for gears, especially on a road trip going up Highway 50 to South Lake Tahoe.



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 109.8 inches

Length 192.5 inches

Height 67.7 inches
Width 74.6 inches
Weight (FWD) 4,222
Track (f/r) 64.4/64.0 inches
Ground clearance 7.3 inches
GVWR 5,666 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) 80
cubic feet (est.)
Seat belts (passenger
capacity) 5
Wheels (std/opt)
18X8.0/20X8.0 inch alloys
Tires (std/opt)
235/65X18/235/55X20
Turning circle 40.0 feet
Steering lock to lock 2.70
turns
Coefficient of drag 0.34

Performance RX350 FWD

0-60 mph 6.74 seconds
50-70 mph 3.49 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 4.78
seconds
Top Speed Electronically
limited to 112 mph
Fuel economy EPA rated at
20/28/23
city/highway/combined mpg
(FWD). Expect 22 mpg in
rural country driving with
some stop and go and 32-33
mpg on the highway at legal

speeds.

Performance hasn't materially changed from my last two RX Road Beats, albeit the previous generation. Zero-60 mph averaged 6.74 seconds, which is four-tenths slower than my record setting last RX test from a year ago. The difference may have been its AWD system and better traction off the line and perhaps small changes in gearing. However, in passing runs from 50-70 mph, the new RX was a tenth of second quicker at 3.49 seconds. The same run up a 6 percent grade 50-70 mph required 4.78 seconds. Those are virtually the same from prior tests, the level pass is probably helped by the new tranny. Bottom line is that it is very responsive with plenty of get up and go.

However, the new eight-speeder really shows off in improved fuel economy. My last test of an AWD RX had EPA numbers of 18/24/20 mpg city/highway/combined, this new FWD returns 20/28/23 mpg and with AWD the number improves over my last AWD tester to 19/26/22 mpg. But in real life it is even better, mostly due to the new tranny. My 2015 tester spun at 2,200 rpm at 70 mph, now the number is only 1,750 rpm and that makes a huge difference. My 2015 model on a two-way run averaged 25 mpg at 70 mph, this new 2016 model returned 32.8 mpg, a 7.8 mpg or a 31 percent improvement. Overall it improved to about 22-23 mpg in rural hilly driving. On a run from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe and back the RX returned 27.3 mpg, a 2 mpg improvement over my last test.

Fuel economy is up significantly with no loss in performance, but how does it change directions? Improved which means very good. While suspension remains state of the art MacPherson Struts up front and a double wishbone set up in the rear, the electronic power steering has been sharpened (now 2.70 turns lock to lock) and the tires and wheels have grown. RX alloys are now 20X8 inches and the rubber is 235/55X20. The result is even more cornering power and improved handling. The RX is

remarkably good when the road bends. It will impress most drivers.

When it gets to ride quality, can you say Lexus? Yes, it is beyond smooth and quiet, it's a Lexus. Sharp bumps do not unsettle the passengers and the chassis and body are more like a bank vault. And that rpm at 70 mph is just 1,750, no extraneous noise from the tires, road and/or wind.

While the brakes are the same size 13-inch ventilated disc front and rear it stop from 40 mph was a foot shorter at an excellent 41 feet. It has an alphabet soup electronic interventions plus incredible good triple beam LED headlights (part of the Lexus Safety System, \$2,250). But standard lighting is also excellent.

Inside is semi-aniline leather done in a cream tan (Luxury package, \$4,610) otherwise you get NuLuxe interior in black or stratus gray. With heating, cooling and power every which way, to say they are comfortable is an understatement. Standard NuLuxe seating trim does a credible job of imitating leather but most buyers will prefer the leather.

Instrumentation includes a large tach and speedo separated by an information center, but the center stack panel is topped by a free standing 12-inch screen that is only about 6-inches high so it doesn't block your forward view. But it can display a lot of information at one time including the Nav and radio info side by side. The entire vehicle is beautifully detailed, fit and finish is remarkable.

Rear 40/20/40 seating is huge and there is about 80 cubes with everything folded flat behind the front seat.

Pricing for this gorgeous Lexus RX350 FWD starts at \$41,900 plus \$940 for the train and truck from Cambridge, Ontario, Canada. The carpeted floor mats are standard. My tester three main packages, the aforementioned luxury Pack, the Lexus Safety System and a Nav system that lists for \$2,180. It had a

few other options such as blind spot monitor (\$500), intuitive parking assist (\$500), Moonroof (\$1,100) and a couple of other items brings the total sticker to \$54,820. It's a fair amount of money, but it is such a beautiful ride that covers all the bases, a sporty drive with moxie, a luxury vehicle and a Home Depot special, RX continue to be the best selling Lexus.

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.