

Road Beat: 2017 Lexus ES350, entry level luxury



The 2017 Lexus ES350 is a good entry into the luxury market.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Lexus is one of the dominate luxury brands, beginning with the 1990 model year with the first midsize ES starting life as its second generation in 1991. Now in its sixth generation, it moved solidly in the midsize category when it switched from the Camry chassis to the stretched Avalon chassis that has a 111-inch wheelbase.

To completely distinguish the ES from its Toyota counterpart, ES receives an entirely unrelated and different body and look. Lexus build quality and finishes, and a real Lexus interior. It has the signature Lexus front end, of which I am not

exactly a fan favorite, but the rest of the design is understated and pretty, nothing to detract from its luxurious, otherwise conservative lines. It is slick to the wind with a co-efficient of drag of 0.27.

As this Lexus is built around the Avalon platform, the powertrain is identical as well, except for a small change in the higher final drive ratio of about 5 percent. The 3.5L, DOHC, 24 valve V-6 still churns out 268 very smooth horse at 6,200 rpm and 248 pounds of twist at 4,700 rpm. These numbers haven't changed in at least five years. Power is sent to the front wheels via a six speed super smooth auto cog-swapper.

Performance is world class and considering its rated horse power and "only" six-speed tranny, this Lexus is a world class performer. Zero to 60 mph arrives in 5.96 seconds. And its passing performance is even better with a 50-70 mph simulated pass requiring just 2.81 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade expands that time by only a second to 3.84 seconds. That's rockin'. Part of the reason for the super quick passing times is the sweet spot in the tranny ratios hitting third gear at peak torque and accelerating from there. This Lexus is no fuddy-duddy, it's a world class performer. Those numbers are almost identical to my last ES go-round as they should be as the engine/tranny remain the same. It just demonstrates Lexus incredibly consistent, high build quality.



Specifications

Price (base including

transportation) SE \$24,115
to over \$30 large for a
loaded V-6

Engines

3.5L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 268
hp @ 6,200 rpm
248 lbs.-ft. of torque @
4,700 rpm

Transmissions

Six speed torque converter
automatic

Configuration

Transverse front
engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 111.0 inches
Length 193.3 inches
Width 71.7 inches
Height 57.1 inches
Track (f/r) 62.6/62.0 inches
Ground clearance 5.5 inches
Weight 3,571 pounds
GVWR 4,696 pounds
Weight distribution (f/r)
61/39 percent
Passenger volume 100.1 cubic
feet
Trunk capacity 15.2 cubic
feet
Fuel capacity 17.2
Steering lock to lock 2.85
turns
Turning circle 37.4 feet
Wheel sizes 7.5X18 inches
alloy
Tires 225/45X18
Co efficient of drag 0.27

Performance

0-60 mph 5.96 seconds

50-70 mph 2.81 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 3.84
seconds

Top speed Electronically
limited at 130 mph

Fuel economy EPA rated at
21/30/24 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect to achieve 25 mpg in
overall driving and 32 mpg
on the highway at legal
speeds.

Fuel economy is also quite good. EPA says expect 21/30/24 mpg city/highway/combined. In my first 200 miles driving extremely aggressively including all performance testing, the ES averaged 24.1 mpg. Think about it. Here is a vehicle that outperforms just about every muscle car from the '50s and '60s and gets three times the fuel economy. I call that miraculous progress. Seventy mph on the highway will delivered 32 mpg in a two-way run. My round trip to Carson City in very aggressive driving averaged 28.8 mpg.

If I were to use that same 1950-60's analogy with respect to handling, the ES lap times would embarrass the muscle car. Sure, it has the same advance underpinnings again of the Avalon, but hey the Avalon is a great car to begin with. Steering is 2.9 turns lock to lock, albeit a bit numb and too easy for my tastes, but accurate just the same. it has attractive 18 x 7.5-inch alloys shod with 225/45 rubber so needless to say the ES has good cornering power. Sure, its sprung a bit soft for my tastes, but my tastes might be a little firm for your backside anyway. But the ES keeps the body roll in reasonable check and holds down reasonably well the bobbing and weaving when undulations are incurred in

cornering.

ES is about ride quality, quiet, smooth and absorbing. And it delivers with a ten score. In the ES, comfort is king. Not much float mind you, motions are well control as is the road, itself. The engine spins a modest 1,900 rpm at 70 mph. And with the reasonably large 17.2-gallon fuel tank, 500 miles non-stop would be a piece of cake as this Lexus is made for non-fatiguing long distance cruising. And with the superb sound system, you will not go to sleep.

Not to be outdone with respect to safety, the ES has it all including lane departure warning and steering assist. But safety foremost always resides in the driver. Brakes a terrific and the headlights are fantastic and the auto high beam system works perfectly, better than any driver. Leave it in high beam "auto" and your safety will be enhanced. Also standard are ten airbags.

Inside is a sumptuous interior as my tester had the optional Ultra Luxury Package (\$3,500) which if mentioned would be book length. Steering wheel is real wood and leather and costs \$450.

Seating is very comfortable, but in my aggressive driving more side bolstering would be nice. While this may be a luxu ride, it can generate some good "g's" in the corners. Rear seating is also copious and luxurious. Good for three.

Instrumentation is complete, big tach and speedo front and center, great trip computer and a fairly easy to use center stack. Still not a fan of the mouse system, but after a few days it becomes second nature.

Pricing for this entry level, real luxu ride begins at \$38,900 plus \$975 for the train from its Georgetown, Ky., assembly plant. We here in America can also build them to Lexus's super high quality standards. My tester had the packages above plus the concert hall Mark Levinson sound system and NAV for

another \$2,500 and with a few other items like the wheel package, LED headlights and \$500 for the blind spot detection brought to total damages to \$49,210. Go drive one, but you might want to bring your checkbook.

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.