

# Road Beat: 2017 Lexus 300h – fabulous execution



The 2017 Lexus 300h makes one rethink opinion about hybrids. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Most of my readers know that I am not a fan of hybrids, but recent experiences may be changing my mind. The coup de grace may have been rendered by the new Lexus 300h, which offered unparalleled quiet, comfort, performance and fuel economy in a luxurious package for well under \$50,000.

And this was a completely loaded vehicle right down to the splendid Mark Levinson sound system and the luxury suite for the boat ride from its Fukuoka, Japan, manufacturing plant.

Even my brother who owns a competing Q50 Infiniti made the

remark he thought for him the Lexus was not just a better car overall, but considered trading his Q for this ride.

Lexus L'Finesse design is taking hold as this was a beautiful vehicle. I finally get the front-end design. It's the first Lexus sedan that looked pretty from the front. The rest of the design is conservative with excellent proportions and lines. It is a big midsize with a longish 111-inch wheelbase and a length of 193 inches, but it's narrower width of 72 inches makes the 300h extremely manageable. It stands a reasonable 57-inches tall.

It's quiet comes partially from its hybrid power system. In other words, during much of the drive, the Lexus runs pure electric. The main engine is the venerable but re-tweaked 2.5L DOHC, 16 valve Atkinson cycle engine, which puts out 156 hp at 5,700 rpm and an equal amount of twist peaking at a lower 4,500 rpm. While not much info is given about the electric aspect of the drive train, one can deduce that maximum hp available from the electric motor is 44 hp giving the combine output off 200 hp. May not sound like much, but it performs like it has at least 250 hp or more as evidenced by the numbers.



### **Specifications**

**Price** \$42,795 to near \$49,999

### **Engine**

2.5L DOHC, 16 valve inline

four cylinder 156 hp @ 5,700 rpm

156 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,500 rpm

Maximum Electric motor output 44 hp

Combined power output 200 hp

### **Transmission**

CVT

### **Configuration**

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 111.0 inches

Length 193.3 inches

Width 71.7 inches

Height 57.1 inches

Weight 3,682 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)  
59/41 percent

GVWR 4,740 pounds

EPA passenger volume 100.1 cubic feet

Trunk capacity 12.1 cubic feet

Fuel capacity 17.2 gallons

Wheels 17X7 inch alloys

Tires 215/55RX17 all season

Steering lock to lock 2.9 turns

Turning circle 37.4 feet

Co-efficient of drag 0.27

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 6.63 seconds

50-70 mph 3.73 seconds

50-70 mph 4.93 seconds

Top speed Governed at 112

mph

Fuel economy EPA rated at  
40/39/40 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 36 mpg in rural  
country driving and 42.2 mpg  
on a level highway at 70 mph  
(two-way run).

Zero to 60 mph arrives in a scant 6.63 seconds. That is very quick. Passing performance numbers are equally as telling as a 50-70 mph simulated pass was timed at 3.73 seconds and the same run up a steep grade only slowed that number by just over a second to 4.93 seconds. This thing flies. Good thing it doesn't have wings. And it's no light weight either, tipping the scales at 3,682 pounds.

So, it runs like a scalded dog at full tilt boogie, so you would think it goes through fuel like a 747 on takeoff (a slight exaggeration?). EPA rates the 300h at 40/39/40 mpg city/highway/combined, but it does a little better. At 70 mph on cruise control, the Lexus averaged 42.2 mpg and in my round trip to Carson City over the Sierra, which included plenty of aggressive driving, the 300h averaged 40.4 mpg for the round trip and 47.2 mpg for the trip from Carson City to Placerville. Overall fuel economy in aggressive rural driving the fuel economy averaged 35 mpg as there was less regen time for the battery and less EV time, but the 300h will EV under very light throttle pressure to about 55-60 mph.

Steering was quick and light, just 2.9 turns lock to lock. MacPherson struts are in all four corners and it is set up to offer more comfort than a track vehicle. Wheels 17 x 7 inch alloys shod with 215/55 rubber, not exactly what are known as meats. Track is wide at 63/62 inches front and rear. So, you wouldn't expect to see Mario hustling around Mazda Laguna Seca Raceway, but automobiles have really improved and the 300h

isn't half bad in the twisties and exceeds most drivers' capabilities. Yeah there is some body roll, more than a super sport sedan, but the 300h tracks well and doesn't lose its composure when pushed hard. It acquitted itself beautifully on Highway 50 from Ice House Road all the way to the summit.

But the benefit is a magic carpet, sublimely quiet ride. If your passengers need to rest, this 300h will cure their insomnia. It smooths out road irregularities as if the pavement were new. Maybe Caltrans instead of fixing the roads should deliver new 300h's to all California drivers and go home as their job of fixing roads would be done and as an additional benefit, it would lower California's fuel consumption. Now why didn't I think of that earlier? Maybe a certain San Francisco assemblyman/woman will introduce a bill for just such a thing claiming he's saving the environment. Here's an easy way to do it.

Safety is all there in spades, great ABS brakes, all the rest of the safety acronyms, enough airbags to make Washington politicians look like lightweights and then there are the superb low beam LED headlights. High beams, while not LEDs are also very good. Please remember, basic safety comes back to driving ahead, staying ahead of the power curve, paying attention and exercising good judgment.

Lexus is about value, quality and luxury and while the 300h is more of an entry level Lexus (the hybrid version of the ES350), it leaves little to be desired with respect to all three of those qualities. Attention to detail and quality of materials are second to none. Everything is power and the leather seating is sublime.

Built on the Avalon platform, it is very spacious inside and the instrument panel, while not glitzy, is a champ even sporting a tach when operating in sport mode. Something needs to be mentioned about the driving modes which offer ECO, normal and Sport. Let me tell you there is a difference

between Sport mode and the other two. This ES changes character in Sport mode from an extremely smooth and fluid runner to an aggressive cat. It literally jumps at a touch of the throttle with almost instant reactions. It really surprised me and what a great surprise it was. Kudos to Lexus for that.

Two tiny negatives with the 300h, the gas tank while still large is 17.2 gallons and the trunk loses a couple of cubes, down to 12.1 cubes.

Pricing for this superb automobile, which my brother thought may have been one of my best test cars ever, starts at \$41,820, plus shipping of \$975 from its Fukuoka, Japan, assembly plant. My ride had some great options including the Mark Levinson sound system (\$2,590) pushing the grand total to \$48,415, still a good price considering what you get in the bargain. And bargain may be the operative word here.

*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.*