

Road Beat: 2018 Lexus NX 300 F Sport, smooth and slick



The NX 300 F Sport is worth a drive. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Lexus is known for two things among several – fit, finish and smoothness. Of course there are other qualities such as build quality and reliability, but the first thing noticed was the NX's smoothness in motion.

NX comes in many variations, a 200t, a 300h, and in my tester's case, an NX 300 F Sport, a version that comes standard with a sport-tuned suspension, paddle shifters, special metallic trim, and bigger special 18 x 7.5-inch wheels with 225/60 series rubber all season tires and for the real sporting types 235/55 summer tires.

NX is a compact luxu CUV that rides on a 105-inch wheelbase and stretches out just 182 inches. But its width of 74 inches adds some aggressive muscle while it stands a rather stout 65 inches. Its sleekness is created by its huge, flowing Lionizes grille and its window line. It is an attractive ride.

Powering the NX 300 is a 2.0L twin scroll turbo intercooled, DOHC, 16 valve inline four-cylinder engine that knocks down 235 large horse which arrive at a low 4,800 rpm and stays there until 5,600 rpm. When you add that to a perfectly flat torque curve that peaks at 258 pounds of twist at an off-idle 1,650 rpm and holds that number until 4,000 rpm.

While most cars have gone to 8 and even 10 speed cog-swappers, the NX still survives on a six speeder which was state of the art just a few years ago but it still performs admirably shoving the AWD NX to 60 mph in just 7.02 seconds. Passing performance is also exemplary with a 50-70 mph simulated passing maneuver requiring a scant 3.38 seconds and the same run uphill slowing that time to just 4.67 seconds.



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) 61.8/61.8 inches

Ground Clearance 6.9 inches

Weight (fwd/awd) 3,940/4,050
pounds

GVWR (fwd/awd) 5,090/5,200
pounds

Tow capacity 2,000pounds

Fuel Capacity 15.9 gallons

Cargo capacity (second row
up/down) 17.7/54.6 cubic
feet

Wheels (std/opt) 17X7/18X7.5
inches

Tires (std/opt) 225/65X17;
225/60X18; 235/55X18

Steering lock to lock 2.68
turns

Turning circle 37.4 feet

Co-efficient of drag 0.34

Performance

0-60 mph 7.02 seconds

50-70 mph 3.38 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 4.67
seconds

Fuel economy EPA rated
22/27/24 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 28-29 mpg on the
highway at legal speeds and
24-26 mpg in suburban
driving.

Throttle response isn't quite linear as the boost at certain times reflects either a little bit of turbo lag or overboost. Not a problem, but something the sensitive driving might notice.

In my last NX review, which was a hybrid of a combined 194 hp, performance was a little off when compared to the NX 300, but over half a second to 60 mph and by a second and a second and a half in the two passing tests. But fuel economy does suffer by at least 10-15 percent with the turboed 300 which is rated in the EPA tests at 22/27/24 mpg city/highway/combined for the AWD unit.

Reality says the numbers are conservative as the NX averaged 28.5 mpg in a two-way 70 mph highway run if about 20 miles. In an aggressive round trip to Carson City over Echo Summit the NX averaged 26 mpg. Overall expect about 25 mpg as I averaged about 25.4 mpg for the 400 miles of testing. The Hybrid version should average about 5 mpg more.

Handling is what the NX and especially the F Sport is all about. It is amazing how a tall CUV can still negotiate corners at speed, with confidence and whatever. NX has the creds, with Mac struts up front and a double wishbone system in the rear. Track is a wide 62 inches front and rear. The electric power rack is very quick at 2.68 turns lock to lock and a turning circle of 37.4 feet. Wheels and tires are big and meaty turning the NX into a sporting sedan. Beautiful. Even with AWD there was some torque steer under heavy, low speed throttle applications.

And it gives up nothing in ride quality with an uncanny smoothness and ride quality. It absorbs bumps with aplomb and head tossing is kept to a minimum. This NX came with adaptive variable suspension, \$770. Engine speed at 70 mph is a reasonably low 2,200 as outside noise is kept to a Lexus minimum. Nice job, Lexus, considering the AWD model weighs 4,050 with a GVWR of 5,200 pounds giving the NX a big payload of 1,150 pounds.

Safety starts with Lexus Safety System plus which includes Things like lane keep steering assist and automatic high beams. And the Bi-LED headlights are fabulous. All the other safety acronyms are present as well as large four-wheel disc brakes (fronts ventilated).

Inside are great seats covered in what I thought was leather, but wasn't, it was a Lexus' material called NuLuxe. It fooled me. The steering wheel is leather. While instrumentation is complete, the center stack protrudes a bit into the cabin and the sound system. But the system is controlled by a mouse system. Ever wish for rat poison? Buttons and round knobs are much easier to use and manipulate, never mind being more accurate.

NX's sleek shape does put at average for interior volume with a cargo capacity of 55 cubes behind the front chairs and 18 cubes behind the second row, still voluminous enough to do serious damage at your local Home Depot or Lowe's.

Base price for this NX 300 AWD F Sport is \$39,775 plus \$995 for the boat suite from its Fukuoka, Japan assembly plant or \$40,770 with the F Sport package adding an additional \$2,685.

Nav and the Premium sound system adds another \$1,800 and the LED headlights with auto high beam plus some other safety stuff will add \$1,515. Other items including the \$595 for the premium Transonic Blue Mica paint added about \$3,350 bring the total sticker to \$50,325.

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.