

Road Beat: Land Cruiser, not the biggest, but perhaps the best



Land Cruiser is well known for its world-class performance. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

In its current generation, the Land Cruiser is several years old, but that hasn't stopped the refinement of one of the world's best automobiles in terms of comfort, handling, utility, performance and value. Some of you might question that value when the LC with full time four-wheel drive stickers for nearly \$85,000. The answer is easy. Land Cruiser provides you with the luxury of some of the best luxu rides in the world, build quality that is above reproach, near world

class performance and the utility of a moving van in a package that 5 inches short of 200 inches, 78 inches in breath and 6-foot-2-inches tall.

Land Cruiser rides on a long 112-inch wheelbase and in reality, could be considered a large mid-size SUV, not a full size even though its strong, squared muscular shoulders, strong flanks and 65 inches of track make seem bigger than it really is. While it looks upright, the design is kept simple and smooth with perfect proportions and limited add-ons. Consequently, LC's coefficient of drag is a remarkably low 0.35. The window line is next to perfect and it is a great looking packaged first developed nearly 20 years ago. Toyota was smart to only refine what was already a great looking ride, making this year's rendition the best yet.

Under the hood is Toyota's iForce, long stroking 5.7L, DOHC, 32 valve V-8 that produces 381 hp at a low 5,600 rpm and a stout 401 pounds of twist at another low 3,600 rpm. This baby makes prodigious power as demonstrated at the quickness it can move its curb weight over 5,800 pounds (meaning a test weight of well over 6,000 pounds especially with a full fuel load of nearly 25 gallons). Zero to 60 mph arrives in a near world class 6.24 seconds, a time that a 400 (gross) hp 1960 Chrysler 300F could only dream about. Passing performance is also commensurate with 50-70 mph acceleration taking 3.45 seconds on level ground and just 4.73 seconds up a 6-7 percent grade. That is getting it done. One more note is the engine's sound and feel. It doesn't get any better or sweeter.



Specifications

Price \$83,665 to about \$87,160

Engine

5.7L, DOHC, 32 valve V-8
381hp @ 5,600 rpm
401 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 3,600 rpm

Transmission

Eight-speed electronically controlled automatic

Configuration

Longitudinal front engine/all wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 112.2 inches

Length 194.9 inches

Width 77.95 inches

Height 74.0 inches

Ground clearance 8.9 inches

Track (f/r) 64.9/64.7 inches

Weight 5,815 pounds

GVWR 7,385 pounds

Weight Distribution (f/r)

51/49 percent

Towing capacity 8,100 pounds

Fuel capacity 24.6 gallons

Cargo capacity third row removed, second row folded

83.1 cubic feet
Turning circle 38.7 feet
Steering lock to lock 3.14
turns
Wheels 18X8.0-inch alloys
Tires 285/60 HR mud and snow
Coefficient of drag 0.35

Performance

0-60 mph 6.24 seconds
50-70 mph 3.45 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 4.73
seconds
Top Speed Electronically
limited to 137 mph
Fuel economy EPA rated at
13/18/15 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 15 mpg in rural
country driving and 20-21
mpg on the highway at legal
speeds.

Helping this remarkable defiance of gravity and Newton's first and second law is an eight-speed torque converter automatic cog-swapper that is smoother than a baby's butt and as responsive as a bull with a rider coming out of the gate.

On the other side of the coin and this LC requires a bit, is fuel consumption. The EPA test cycle says the big LC should return 13/18/15 mpg city/highway/combined. In real life it does perhaps 10 percent better. With the cruise control set at 70 mph on a level highway in a two-way run the LC averaged 20.9 mpg. The engine spins just 1,650 rpm at 70 mph, which is not far above idle. Overall the fuel economy was about 15 mpg in 500 miles of aggressive driving with only five percent of that time on a four-lane level freeway and with significant use of that delicious throttle. In a 200-mile round trip from

Placerville to Carson City via Highway 50 the LC averaged a very good 18.7 mpg. So, yes, the LC by today's standards is not a fuel miser, but compared to the big 6-7.0L V-8's of the late 1950s and 60s, the LC would blow the doors off of most of those offerings and get significantly better fuel economy, too boot. Everything needs to be in context. The Land Cruiser considering its size and performance is surprisingly economical.

Suspension is what Toyota calls Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System, with double wishbones up front and a four-link system in the rear. It is a solid axle with four locating arms with coils in all four corners and big stab bars at each end. Eighteen by eight-inch alloys are shod with fat 285/60 series rubber and the steering is reasonably quick 3.14 turns lock to lock. The bottom line is heavy vehicles don't like to change directions, but this LC does it well with lots of grip from those wide tires. And its not so top heavy to give you an uneasy feeling. I really enjoyed the LC in the twisties and I am sure most other cars I encountered were a bit surprised as to its agility. It will surprise you too. Even when the road was damp from rain it was extremely secure in high speed turns. Turning circle is a reasonably tight 38.7 feet.

But now to the best part, ride quality and this is where the LC competes or even outshines vehicles costing tens of thousands more. First it is about the most solid vehicle the Road Beat has encountered. A literal bank vault on wheels. It is also one of the quietest, smoothest and best riding vehicles ever encountered by the Road Beat, soaking up all road imperfections like a Tempurpedic mattress. There is absolutely no float as it literally sucks up the bumps, big ones, little ones, dips, speed bumps and even curbs. Off road, that first scratch on its magnificent finish will be a killer, so be careful.

LED headlights are outstanding on both high and low beams with the added feature of automatic high beams. Just leave them in

auto, it will not only amaze you but keep you safer. Brakes are strong and huge with four-wheel ventilated discs of nearly 14 inches diameter. All the safety acronyms are here, too.

Inside is sublime luxury with semi-aniline perforated leather seating and any seat in the first two rows is a treat to be in. All four are heated with the fronts being ventilated as well. This LC exudes luxury in the doors, dash covering and center console.

Instrumentation is complete with a big tach and speedo and four ancillary gauges plus a complete trip computer. The center stack is touch screen and easy to use. You will be up to speed in about five minutes and the sound system is about equal to Carnegie Hall.

Cargo capacity is voluminous, over 81 cubes behind the front chairs and 43 cubes behind the second row with the third row folded. It still has 16 cubes behind the third row when in use.

Sticker shock is \$84,960, including the boat from Aichi, Japan. My tester had the \$2,200 rear entertainment system bringing the total to \$87,160. But this isn't your ordinary Camry, the Land Cruiser is a special vehicle. One passenger who owned a 1994 LC remarked how the character of the LC remained the same, just improving the luxury and capabilities, but the feel was quite similar, like riding in an impregnable bank vault. That pretty much sums it up, except for it will be the most comfortable bank vault you will ever experience.

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.