

Road Beat: Each Lexus seems better than the last



The 2018 Lexus GX460 will have you wondering if this is the best ride you've ever had. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

I don't have an answer, but this new GX460 midsize Lexus SUV seems to be the smoothest and best riding Lexus the Road Beat has ever tested. And I am including all Lexuses tested, including the unbelievably smooth ES300h. Each one seems to be an improvement over the prior Lexus tested. And that is improving on a bar that is already sky high.

Loosely based on the Toyota 4Runner, the GX becomes an almost entirely new ride that shows no resemblance to its would be, at best, second cousin. (Probably more like a fourth cousin). By loosely based, the GX shares wheelbases (110 inches and the

basic chassis set up with an almost identical track at 62.4 inches). Suspension is a state of the art double wishbone up front and a four link well controlled live axle in the rear. Yes, the rear set up is non-independent, but in this case a super well controlled system which uses a Toyota/Lexus Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System (KDSS) which reduces body lean (head tossing) without making the ride feel stiff. More on that later.

Of course, while both the 4Runner and GX are two box designs, they are totally different with the GX getting a L-finesse look via the signature Lexus front end which in this case looks great, perfect proportions, muscular fender shapes and a great window line incorporating the GX themed rear window kink. It is a beautiful vehicle finished with exquisite Lexus quality. And with a co-efficient of drag at 0.35 it's pretty slick to the wind.



Specifications

Price \$52,850 to about \$75,000

Engine

4.6L DOHC, 32 valve V-8 301 @ 5,500 rpm

329 lb.-ft. of torque @ 3,500 rpm

Transmission

Six-speed torque converter automatic

Configuration

Longitudinal front
engine/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 109.8 inches

Length 192.1 inches

Width 74.2 inches

Height 74.2 inches (with
roof rack)

Ground clearance 8.1 inches

Weight 5,130 pounds

GVWR 6,600 pounds

Track (f/r) 62.4/62.4 inches

Steering lock to lock 3.0
turns

Turning circle 38.1 feet

Fuel capacity 23 gallons

Cargo capacity 64.7 cubic
feet

Wheels 18X7.5 inches

Tires P265/60X18

Tow capacity 6,500 pounds

Coefficient of drag 0.35

Performance

0-60 6.73 seconds

50-70 3.64 seconds

50-70 uphill 5.32 seconds

Top speed – Who cares? It
will cruise effortlessly,
quietly and smoothly well
above all legal speed limits
in the United States.

Fuel economy

EPA rated 15/18/16 mpg
city/highway/combined.

Expect 16-17 mpg in rural
country driving and 21 mpg

on the highway at legal speeds.

Under the gorgeous hood is a 4.6L DOHC 32 valve V-8 with all the bells and whistles that cranks out 301 horses at a low 5,500 rpm, plus a solid 329 pounds of peak twist at just 3,500 rpm. It is connected to a silky-smooth six-speed torque converter auto cog swapper that drives all four wheels all the time. For serious work, GX gets an electronic locking two speed center differential. It has the capability to go just about anywhere a mountain goat might. But that first scratch on its incredible paint finish will be a killer. Let's be honest, most GXs will rarely see anything but pavement, but when the weather turns really bad or the paved road ends even with foot deep ruts, the GX can keep on going without fear or considering its fabulous ride quality, without much disturbance to its occupants.

Excellent performance is about guaranteed by the aforementioned fab, super smooth and sounding V-8. A dead stop to 60 mph at full tilt boogie will arrive in just 6.73 seconds and that's in spite of the anti-gravity forces created by its 5,130 pounds of mass. Passing is also equally satisfying with 50-70 mph runs of 3.64 and 5.32 seconds on the level and up a steep grade. GX gets it done. The throttle and tranny are very responsive. It is rated to tow 6,500 pounds and doing so should be a non-issue.

The EPA rates the GX at 15/18/16 mpg city/highway/combined or only a 1 mpg improvement over its slightly bigger brother the LX570 with a more powerful 5.7L V-8 of 381 horses. While the GX does a bit better than what the EPA says it should do by about two mpg, it's better than its bigger brother. At 70 mph in a two-way run on a level highway, the GX averaged 21.1 mpg or about 2 mpg better than the LX. In a 200-mile run from Placerville to Carson City and return the GX averaged 20 mpg. Overall in 500 miles of testing the average was 16.8 mpg.

Compared to a behemoth from the late 1950s or 1960s, this is remarkable fuel economy, especially considering it would just about blow the doors off most muscle cars, but hey, this is the 21st century. I'll leave the political commentary to your imagination. Let's just say I love this GX and most everything about it.

Handling is aided by reasonably quick electric power steering rack (3.0 turns lock to lock), big 18 x 7.5-inch alloys shod with meaty 265/60 rubber and the ability to tailor ride and handling from normal, sport and comfort. It makes this big Lexus become an easy handler with plenty of cornering power. It comes standard with all the electronic wizardry and during some aggressive corner exercises it actually intervened even though the GX was not even close to letting go. Most, if not all, GX drivers will never get to that point, but at least you know it's really there and working.

Quiet is the key word for the GX, so much so even the muting is muted. And then there is the ability to absorb bumps. It's about the best the Road Beat ever encountered and I recently said that about a related vehicle, the Land Cruiser. The GX has the edge here, that's how good it is. My tester was the GX Luxury which adds Adaptive Variable Suspension and Adjustable Height Control with the former undoubtedly contributing to its incredible ride quality. The engine spins a low 1,750 rpm at 70 mph and this is one silent, smooth automobile.

Safety is everywhere. GX has just about every acronym, especially with the Driver Support package (\$4,340) which also adds the Mark Levinson sound system. I already mentioned how the vehicle stability control system works, it does, maybe intervening a little too early for my tastes, but it works. Headlights are excellent especially with intelligent high beam control (low beams are LED).

Other items worth mentioning are the hill decent control, pioneered in the GX plus other systems of raising and lowering

ride height and more.

Inside is all Lexus with extreme quality everywhere. Sublime seating is semi-aniline soft, thick leather. Seats are heated and cooled plus the steering wheel is heated. Materials on the doors, console, dash and elsewhere are some of the best ever encountered. Instrumentation is complete with a big tach and speedo flanking a center trip/info center.

The center stack while appearing complex is easy to use and there is no mouse. Looking at all the off-road system switches, there is probably no room. Thank goodness for small favors.

Being a square, upright SUV, cargo capacity is large at almost 65 cubes. Just have a look from the big, left side opening tailgate door.

Pricing for the GX the Luxury unit starts at \$63,230 plus \$995 for the luxu suite on the boat from its assembly plant Aichi, Japan. My tester had 10 grand in options, including a dual screen rear entertainment system (\$1,970), a \$1,950 Sport Design package, a Driver Support package (\$4,340) which adds the Mark Levinson Sound System, radar cruise, auto high beams and some other good features and with some other smaller items brings the price of admission to \$75, 072. Perhaps the real value is in the base GX which starts at about \$53,000. It's a superb vehicle any way you price it.

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.