

Road Beat: 2018 Lexus LC500h, the epitome of motoring



The 2018 Lexus LC500h is worth the money. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Let's just start this Road Beat with a bang, a very big bang. The Lexus LC500h is perhaps the best car I have ever driven. The best. It is an absolute tour de force of automotive technology, performance, handling, ride, quiet, style and fuel economy. Yeah, it costs a hundred Gs, but anything close to it costs double. In other words, as super cars go, it's a bargain, too.

Styling is about as slick as it gets. The fuselage is a coke bottle with smooth flowing wheel flares of bulging muscles. Significant details such as a hood line disappearing into the

"A" pillar, the floating roof or the slightly ovoid windshield make this Lexus one of the best-looking cars ever. Forged 20-inch gorgeous alloys with 245/45 and 275/40 series tires fully fill up those wheel wells. Most of us don't like fat butts, but in the automotive world it looks fabulous when the rear dominates. Even the Lexus L'finesse grille looks good in black and it basically follows the overall shape of the grille.

It's not a small car riding on a long 113-inch wheelbase and an overall length of a smaller mid-size sedan at 187 inches. Hey, but it has a back seat. Maybe not for adult humans, but it's there. And it even has a well-shaped trunk of 5 cubic feet. It easily swallowed a 40-pound bag of dog food. It could have handled two. And while it looks as wide as an aircraft carrier, it's a bit svelte at just below 76 inches. It looks wider. Kudos to Lexus for creating such a great optical illusion. And it's not like a GT40 which was only 40 inches tall (hence its name), it actually is 53 inches and ingress and egress is easy. In another Lexus illusion, LC looks lower. Interestingly, the co-efficient of drag is 0.33. It looks much more of a wind cheater, but spoilers (downforce) must play a part in its incredible handling.



Specifications

Price about \$100,000

Engine

3.5L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 295
hp @ 6,600 rpm

257 lb.-ft. of torque @

4,900 rpm

Electric System

L-i battery pack

59 hp electric motor to rear wheels

Total combined 354 hp

Transmission

Four speed multistage hybrid transmission

Configuration

Longitudinal Front
engine/rear wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 113.0 inches

Length 187.4 inches

Width 75.6 inches

Height 53.0 inches

Track (f/r) 64.2/64.4 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Weight 4,435 pounds

GVWR 5,430 pounds

Weight distribution (f/r)
52/48

Fuel capacity 22.2 gallons

Trunk capacity 4.7 cubic
feet

Steering lock to lock 2.6
turns

Turning circle 35.4 feet

Wheels 20-inch alloys

Tires (f//r)
245/45X20//275/40X20

Co-efficient of drag 0.33

Performance

0-60 mph 4.28 seconds

50-70 mph 2.08 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 2.62

seconds

Top speed Electronically limited at 155 mph

Fuel economy EPA rated at 26/36/30 mpg city/highway/combined.

Expected 41 mpg on the highway at legal speeds and 32-35 mpg in rural, suburban driving.

LC500s come in two versions, the hybrid "h" version and the throbbing, 471 hp (at a sky high 7,100 rpm) 5.0L V-8. My tester was the hybrid with a less throbbing 3.5L, DOHC, 24 valve, Atkinson Cycle V-6 that at 6,600 rpm peaks at 295 hp and 257 pounds of twist at 4,900 rpm. But it gets an electric kicker also driving the rear wheels, a 59 hp electric motor that brings its combined total power to 354 hp. Doesn't sound like a lot for a \$100K supercar, but the horses must be the size of elephants as its performance is almost unbelievable.

How about 0-60 mph in 4.28 seconds? Lexus says 4.7, but they must have forgot to release the parking brake. It will run from 50-70 mph on a level highway in 2.06 seconds and going up a steep grade is barely noticeable as that time only falls off to 2.62 seconds. If it had fins, it could go to the moon. And the car weighs at the curb a portly 4,435 pounds. Interestingly, the larger V-8 is about 20 pounds lighter. Weight balance in the hybrid is better at a perfect 52/48. It's one of the quickest cars the Road Beat has ever tested and certainly the quickest car with less than 360 hp by a country mile. Credit Lexus with the creation of the Super Horse.

Shifting from the four-speed multistage transmission was quick and a muted crisp. It claims only four gears, but feels like about 10 speeds as the rpm drops in a shift acted as such.

Lexus also gives you five driving modes, all with different characteristics, normal which I used, but there is eco, comfort, sport and sport plus which changes the tach for easier reading. It's all good, very good.

Here's what is so amazing with this Lexus, it returns the fuel economy of a compact car. In a 200-mile round trip from Placerville to Carson City over Highway 50, this literal rocket ship averaged 38.7 mpg. The EPA test cycle says you should get 26/35/30 mpg in the city/highway/combined test cycle, but in an 80-mile round trip on a mostly level highway, the LC500h averaged 41.6 mpg. Overall it averaged between 33-35 mpg for the 500 miles of driving including 50 miles of some serious road work wringing out the LC handling characteristics. It was again amazing.

Never was a motor vehicle so easy to drive fast and quick in the twisties, and I mean fast. This is the best handling car the Road Beat has ever tested with more grip than 5 pounds of Gorilla Glue. Steering while lacking some feel was quick and super accurate almost never requiring mid-corner adjustments or corrections. It is easy to drive fast. Its creds are obvious, a state of the art multilink suspension in all four corners, the electric power steering rack is a variable speed sensing system, tires, either Bridgestone, Dunlop or Michelin are designed for performance, but still offer serene comfort and low tire noise and if you get over exuberant, huge four-wheel ventilated discs with six piston calipers up front and four piston calipers in the rear will arrest all unnecessary speed. Only once did the LC understeer in an off camber decreasing radius sharp lefty. But it always remained composed, planted and secure.

Ride quality is serene, especially in relaxed motoring, not slow but relaxed. Yes, the ride is firm, but it absorbs bumps like a world class fighter and the highway ride is about the best encountered. I know superlatives abound in this Road Beat, however, this is a superlative motor vehicle.

Comparisons to a 6 Series BMW abound, but the Lexus wins in almost all counts. And we haven't got to the spectacular interior and fit and finish. Engine speed at 70 mph appeared to be about 1,500 rpm, but sometimes it was zero, running EV and other it was idling at 1,000 rpm. Whatever it was, it was silent unless your foot got into it and then the V-6 would let out a muted roar.

I've mentioned the incredible brakes, but there are also all the safety acronyms of which the Traction Control or the Vehicle Stability System sometimes intercedes with the fun, retarding throttle or even braking. I didn't take time to try and turn it off. Probably not a good idea. Headlights were fabulous especially with the auto high beam system.

We are not done yet. Inside was one of the best, if not the best interiors ever encountered. With the flawless outside white finish was the semi-aniline soft tan leather seating and Alcantara head liner and door panels. Bolstering was the best and the overall design beautiful.

If there is a knock, it's the radio system. The mouse touch pad has got to go. It is difficult and distracting. Maybe it's designed to entertain a 10-year-old Apple phone wizard, but not normal adults. In fact, I never could get my phone on their Bluetooth system. But for this, the LC would be a perfect car.

Pricing for the LC500h started at \$96,510, plus \$995 for the luxu boat suite from Aichi, Japan. My ride had a few upgrades, \$1,100 for the Convenience package which includes blind spot, park assist and rear cross traffic alert, \$500 for the heads-up display, \$1,750 for the Semi-aniline leather and Mark Levinson sound system, \$65 for aa trunk/cargo net, \$20 for the key glove and \$105 for carpeted floor mats bringing the price of admission to \$101,385. When compared to the competition (if any), it's a bargain.

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.