

ES:
Extra
Sweet,
Extremely
Smooth

Joe Sage



controls to the overly complex premium controls of that brand's premium-badged brethren. But the Lexus ES is done right: though it offers much more than the Toyota, as we set climate controls, audio, seats and mirrors, we find the Lexus controls straightforward. We avoid saying "plain and simple," as they present every sophisticated feature, but they're well organized and easy to operate.

We started in the Sport setting, tried generic D on a frontage road, then quickly went back to Sport on a freeway ramp. With highly decent fuel economy numbers of 19/27 MPG city/highway, we figure there's enough headroom to take advantage of Sport.

The 6-speed automatic is very, very smooth. Other than typical minor lags on surface street cornering, running quickly between 1st-2nd or 2nd-3rd, shifts are like silk, with no power loss. At our first red light, we see an absolute twin drive by, and it is very handsome.

Our ES has a premium 14-speaker Mark Levinson audio package, but it doesn't knock our socks off. For a middle-of-the-road listener it will seem above average, but for an audiophile, not awesome. A plus is that it has separate equalizer settings for different inputs, e.g. you can boost settings a bit for subpar satellite audio quality. The interface allows all settings to be seen and set at once, a rarity. Further adjustments to the sliders during the week did improve sound quality a bit.

We rate the suspension "near perfect," tracking nicely, no wallowing, firm and smooth on turns, surface streets, freeways, even the driveway curb. Overall, we were happy in this car. It has a nice degree of luxury and style, a nice degree of simplicity, a nice balance.

What about that front-wheel-drive factor? We note that in challenging higher-speed freeway traffic, we do feel torquiness, and lane changes feel a little unsure, but the ES is sufficiently powerful to overcome that, threading bottlenecks like a champ. Power, though by the numbers far less than the LS V8 and a bit lower than the GS with the same basic V6, is there aplenty: we could always put this car where it needed to be. Over and over, our logbook notes a smooth ride, not cushy or wallowing, rather a firm "personal luxury car" feel. It's so smooth and comfortable, we found ourselves at one point driving considerably faster than it felt like, making the car a good candidate for use of cruise control.

The logbook notes that "our last drive was a sweet one," and there you have it. Don't shop Lexus sedans without trying this one on for size and budget. And if the urge is still there to spend twice as much, you won't be sorry if you buy an LS. But might we suggest buying two his'n'her ES sedans instead? ■

OUR TEST LEXUS ES 350

ENGINE.....	3.5L Four Cam 24v V6: 268hp, 248 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION.....	6-speed automatic, sequential shift
DRIVE.....	front-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE, SAFETY/SECURITY, LUXURY/CONVENIENCE FEATURES:	A long, long list. Visit lexus.com .
Base price.....	\$ 35,525*
Intuitive parking assist.....	500
Ultra luxury package.....	3,535
Navigation/audio package.....	4,065
Cargo net.....	64
Trunk net.....	73
TOTAL.....	\$ 44,637

One comparison of major note is that the ES is front-wheel-drive, while the GS and LS are rear-drivers with all-wheel-drive available (and the IS is a front-driver with AWD available). A conundrum. Normally, we'd favor rear- or all-, but the value of the ES is inescapable, and for many, front-wheel drive is a non-issue or even a benefit. This reveals another thing about the Lexus lineup: there are multiple iterations of the IS, GS and LS, but only one ES 350 with one drivetrain. We suspect the ES is prepared very efficiently, just to hit this market segment. And from that, we conclude its bargain status is confirmed.

OUR TIME WITH THE LEXUS ES

In our last issue, we reviewed another manufacturer's sedan and stated that we actually preferred its simpler

If you're shopping for a Lexus sedan (not counting specialty hybrids HS 250h or CT 200h), you have four basic choices: the IS, ES, GS or LS. (Both the GS and LS are also available as hybrids.) The IS is the smallest and least expensive, positioned to take on the BMW 3 Series and starting at \$32,645. At the other end, the LS starts at \$66,230 and climbs from there (the LS hybrid starts at \$111,350). We have covered all but the ES (see arizona-drivermagazine.com > vehicle features) and found much to like in all of them. The big LS is killer, no question. For the GS, we compared its size and power (96-97 percent that of the LS), fuel economy (10-14 percent better) and price (30+ percent less than the LS in gas, almost half off the LS hybrid, a tricked-out long-wheelbase model). We concluded that if you want the prestige of the LS, fine, but the GS is an incredible bargain by comparison.

Enter the ES, and the comparison is only moreso. Its base price of \$36,025 is just 54 percent that of the LS. And its style is much closer to the LS—so close that we sometimes look twice at the badges, in traffic. The LS has a 380-hp V8 and 8-speed automatic, with a 0-to-60 time of 5.4 seconds; the ES has a 268-hp V6 and 6-speed automatic, hitting 60 in 7.0 seconds. The GS comes with either V8 or V6 and either 8-speed or 6-speed, achieving 0-to-60 in 5.4-5.8 seconds, its engines retuned to 303-342 hp to position between the LS and ES.

Yet ES power and acceleration are close to top-performance Germans of ten years ago—not bad at all.

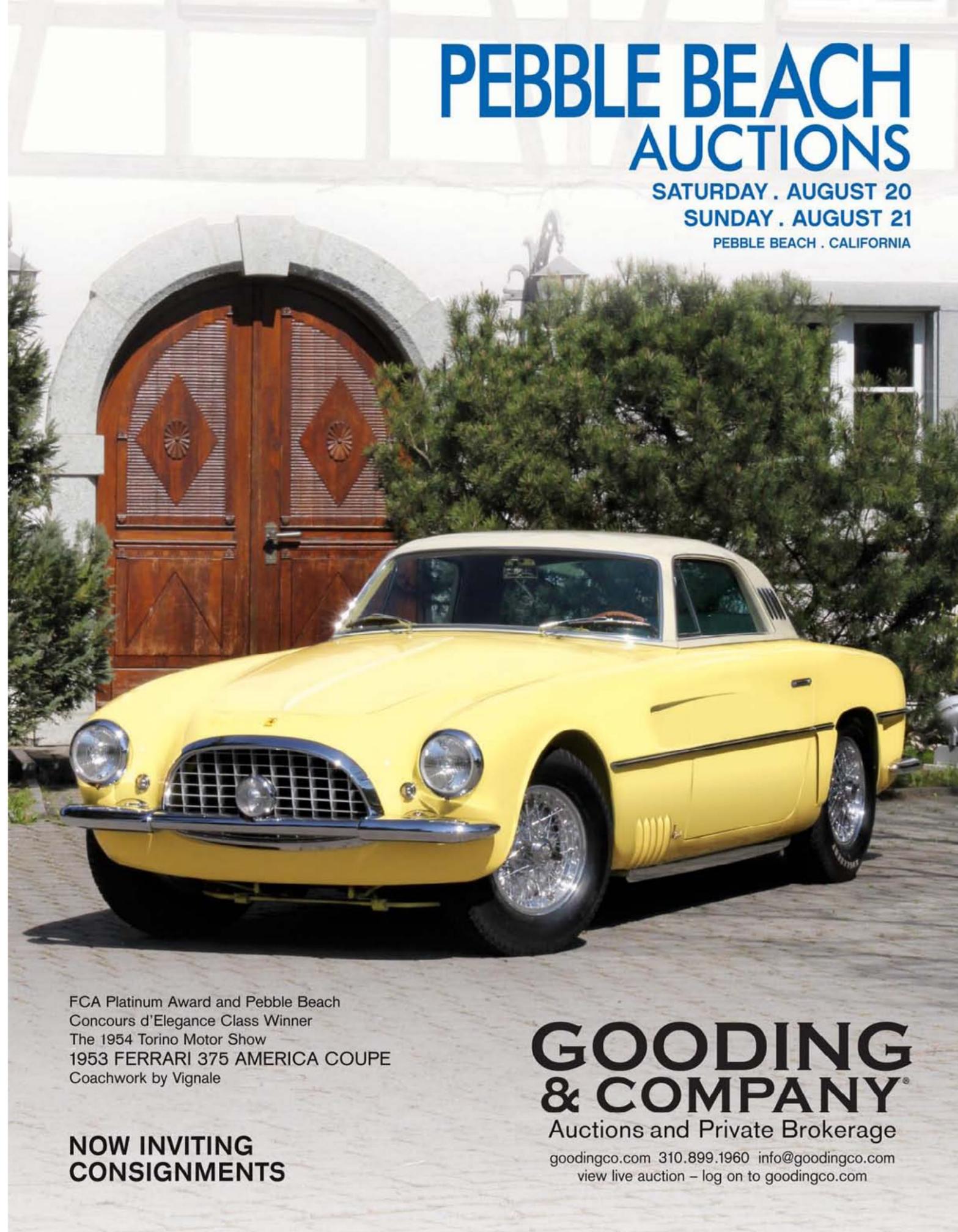


PEBBLE BEACH AUCTIONS

SATURDAY . AUGUST 20

SUNDAY . AUGUST 21

PEBBLE BEACH . CALIFORNIA



FCA Platinum Award and Pebble Beach
Concours d'Elegance Class Winner
The 1954 Torino Motor Show
1953 FERRARI 375 AMERICA COUPE
Coachwork by Vignale

**NOW INVITING
CONSIGNMENTS**

GOODING & COMPANY

Auctions and Private Brokerage

goodingco.com 310.899.1960 info@goodingco.com
view live auction – log on to goodingco.com