

Logic and emotion

A brief course in comparative mathematics lights our fire.

Story and photo: Joe Sage



The Lexus GS is billed as a mid-size luxury car, or executive car, against the LS's full-size luxury designation. The GS originally filled the LS spot in the lineup, in 1991, as the LS moved upsize and upmarket. As the former LS slot was a moving target (its price was climbing as the GS was developed to hit its prior, lower price), the GS was basically born a bargain. And a bargain it still is. In mid-luxury size (an odd combination of terms), the GS delivers most of the goods of the LS:

GENERAL	GS	LS	GS-to-LS
Wheelbase (non-L)	112.2	116.9	96%
Length (non-L)	190.0	198.0	96%
Width	71.7	73.8	97%
Height (AWD)	56.5	58.3	97%
Weight (non-L)	3944	4240	93%
EPA (hybrid)	22/25	20/22	+10-14%
Base price (gas)	\$45,600	\$65,380	69.7%
Base price (hybrid)	\$57,450	\$108,800	52.8%
Sales (US: 2008)	16,000	20,000	80%

The presence of L-only and AWD-only for the LS, with those optional on the GS, as well as hybrids of both models, could make for quite a chart. There are also 6-

speed and 8-speed automatics on the GS, but just an 8-speed on the LS. And variations in the options for each could have you comparing for awhile. But you get the idea. The Lexus GS delivers almost all the goods of the LS, with most key specs at 96-97% those of the LS, while achieving 10-14% better fuel mileage and bearing 7% less weight (a performance and fuel plus).

Most remarkably, the standard-wheelbase gasoline GS is priced at less than 70% of the LS, while comparing hybrids (though trading off length and RWD-AWD variables) delivers you a GS for just over 50% the cost of the LS. Cry no tears for the LS, however. Its sales are still 25% higher than the GS (based on 2008 figures for the US; 2009 figures were considerably lower for everybody and were not all available yet).

One thing to consider if cross-shopping the Lexus LS and Lexus GS: the LS is now in its fourth generation, launched in 2007; the GS is still in its third, launched in 2005. This could be a compelling reason to grab a current GS, before size and price might climb. Or it could be a good reason to wait for the next edition. (We do look forward to the next GS.) Might resale prices suffer on a

model that's closer to the end of its cycle? The crystal ball is always murky, but in the price range of either of these, we'd say get the one that suits your own needs best, and keep it for awhile.

We are impressed as all getout with both the LS and GS. We drove the GS 460 for a week before driving the LS 600h L. Apples and oranges included the long wheelbase for the LS, standard for the GS; gas engine for the GS and hybrid powertrain for the LS; rear-wheel drive for the GS and all-wheel-drive for the LS. Both had the seamless and strong 8-speed automatic. Both were similarly (very fully) appointed with options overall.

The GS gave us highly favorable impressions starting in the first block and building over the first mile (see log-book sidebar) and only built from there. Ditto the LS, in spades, but the GS impressed against a clean slate.

We can easily imagine taking either one home and keeping it. Pride and pecking order are factors in these segments, and you know if you need an LS. If the logic of the numbers presented above gets your attention, do drive the GS. Do drive it, anyway. You could buy two of these, one of those, or one of each. It's your budget. ■

LEXUS LS 460 NOTES

- The Lexus GS 460 is incredibly smooth and quiet but not cushy, a great balance. Within the first block, we like it. Within the first mile, we note that it's a keeper. A Lexus, though not too showy, just right.
- Controls are very good. Nice map, easy touchscreen control, has a good backup camera (which only a few makers really do). Even in the dark and while driving, all are straightforward. A breath of fresh air.
- A linear graph for current mpg seems a wiser implementation than specific numbers, often unreliable, on many others.
- We wish the turn signal indicator's audible indicator was a hair more audible.
- Shiny steering wheel reduces grip.
- Mirror, lighting and other controls are in a small drop-down panel to the left of the steering wheel. Set once and put them away. That's 20 buttons we don't need to have on hand all the time, leaving the instrument panel for primary missions.
- The instrument cluster glass is tinted to avoid or reduce glare or reflection, set automatically or manually within 7 settings, normal, auto-lo, auto-hi and 4 manuals. Nice.
- Interior light controls on the overhead console are good: left light on, right light on, three in the middle for door switch-on-or-off. "On" will override the individual switches and "off" will not, so that's all good. Subtle but effective blue beams from the ceiling illuminate the steering wheel when you enter, and also the shifter.
- Auto headlights hard to override: must turn all the way up and back a click, every time.
- According to the chart, we are mostly getting between 40 and off-the-charts 90+ mpg, of which we're a little skeptical.
- We hit four gears in one block. The car has a very smooth 8-speed transmission.
- We set the shocks in Sport, for a firm ride; there are also settings to soften this.
- Audio interface already set for good sound, evidence that the previous driver was thoroughly enjoying this car as well.
- Both mirrors angle down when you're in reverse (or neither). We'd like a right-side-only option.
- This is not a hybrid, yet it runs so quietly, you could seriously forget to turn it off.
- Parked next to a BMW 750L, the GS seems significantly narrower, and it is: the 7 Series is 74.9" wide to the GS's 71.7" (and the LS at 73.8"). But they have similar long cabins (that's just more apparent on the GS, with its short rear deck).
- Overall, we find this car's tech level is straightforward and intuitive. It does everything, and then some, but the interface does not get in the way of your driving (or the tech feature operations, for that matter).



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