

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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EVENTS...

NASCAR AT PHOENIX INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY
WHEELS OF WELLNESS EVENT
AUCTION WRAPUP

ROAD TRIP...

FOREST ROAD 300: 38 MILES IN 3 HOURS

VEHICLE DRIVES...

LEXUS LS 600h L HYBRID - VOLKSWAGEN GOLF TDI
LEXUS GS 460 - MERCEDES-BENZ GLK 350
BMW X5 DIESEL - GMC TERRAIN AWD SLT-2 - LEXUS RX 350



The Lexus LS is the manufacturer's flagship sedan, available both gasoline- and hybrid-powered. For perspective on the LS 600h L hybrid, we start with a look at the LS 460 AWD.

Lexus LS 460 AWD — When we volunteered to drive part of the route to check mileages for an upcoming event, we knew we would be traversing some fun roads. Sharp corners, elevation changes and lots of open space in the high desert. It seemed like a perfect place to be running a Mustang GT or Nissan 370Z, but our test car that week was the big, luxurious 2009 gasoline-powered Lexus LS 460.

How could we complain about making the 300-mile drive in one of the most quiet, comfortable and smooth-riding cars on the road? As we got down to business, we were enjoying the

pure luxury of the big Lexus, but were a little disconcerted by body lean as we ran through some of the corners. Then we remembered the button on the console that changes the Adaptive Variable Air Suspension to a sportier mode. We pushed it to sport mode, and it was as if we'd changed cars. The ride became firm, totally controlled, and felt more agile and responsive.

As the afternoon and evening progressed, we were eating up the road in this classic luxury car—powered by a sophisticated 357-hp 4.6-liter V8 engine driving all four wheels through a slick eight-speed automatic. All-wheel drive is an option on the LS 460 (standard on the LS 600h L).

The LS turned out to be an amazing road car. The gasoline version accelerates from 0 to 60 mph in a mere 5.4 seconds, with a top speed

limited to 130 mph. The EPA rates it at 16 mpg city and 23 mpg highway, and we actually averaged 21.3 mpg.

On the return trip, we tried out some of the other goodies on the Lexus flagship. The Navigation/Mark Levinson option added a state-of-the-art 19-speaker sound system, and nav even showed traffic patterns as we got closer to town. For cruising, Dynamic Radar Cruise Control kept the big Lexus an equal distance behind a lead vehicle. The system also sets the car up to stop more effectively in the event a vehicle in front does a panic stop.

This car had nearly ever fun and comfort feature known to modern cars, with heated and cooled seats front and rear, backup camera, adaptive lighting that turned with the car, plush leather, real wood and a page full of all the other cool features.

Stealth

This tight and powerful luxury yacht makes an impressive hybrid, rigged for silent running.

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer
Lead photo by Christina Lawrie



*Lexus LS 600h L AWD
Emissions from the luxurious
Lexus LS 600h L hybrid are
cleaner than the ambient air
in some major cities.*

Elegance, luxury and performance don't come cheap, however. The base price of the Lexus LS 460 AWD is \$67,200. Three major option packages include the Navigation/Mark Levinson package (\$5,645), Pre-collision and dynamic radar cruise control (\$2,850) and Luxury value edition package of seat upgrades and automatic door closers (\$2,895) brought the total to \$79,415 including the destination charge.

The LS 460 is not a car for everyone, but for someone shopping for a large, comfortable luxury sedan with good performance, it should be on their shopping list.

Lexus LS 600h L — Lexus has made a big effort to promote sustainable and environmentally sound practices. We joined them for the Lexus Hybrid Living Tour, featuring the GS 450h, RX 400h and LS 600h L.

The big Lexus LS 600h L is not only the ultimate hybrid, but one of the most impressive luxury sedans on the market, period. It is also the kind of car that would work well sitting in the back seat and having a driver, but why give someone else the fun of driving this car?

The Lexus LS has to rank at or near the top of luxury cars for its quiet and comfort, but the hybrid takes it another step. Like most hybrids, this car shuts off the gas engine when you come to a stop, but press lightly on the accelerator and it starts off in a total electric mode and goes, sometimes for blocks, on electric power before the 5.0-liter 389-hp V8 smoothly joins in. (Combined with the two electric motors, the LS 600h L has 438 horsepower.) We also discovered the engine shutting down on slow corners and staying in the electric mode until we accelerated to about 35 mph.

The LS 600h L is driven through the industry's only eight-speed automatic transmission, which produces the silkiest shifts we've ever felt (or never felt). It's also equipped with a state-of-the-art full-time all-wheel-drive system for even better stability and handling capabilities. We had just spent a week in the LS 460 AWD a couple of weeks earlier, and we're still in awe of this amazing car. During our driving time, we actually averaged 23.1 mpg, which was actually better than the EPA rating of 20 mpg city and 22 mpg highway.

There is no performance penalty for this fuel sipper, either. Zero-to-60 mph acceleration takes only 5.5 seconds, and it has a top speed limited to 130 mph. The hybrid power is like having the economy of a V6 engine with the performance of a V8.

And yes: elegance, luxury, performance and a highly refined hybrid powertrain don't come cheap. Air suspension, plush leathers, heated and cooled seats, audiophile sound system and nearly everything you could possibly imagine are included in the LS 600h L's \$108,800 base price (2010). Our test car also had a Premium Package (\$12,000 in 2009) adding such things as a pre-collision system, parking guidance, power rear seats, Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, Pedestrian Detection System and Driver Attention Monitor.

Lexus has a special Hybrid Living section on their website that can guide you to luxury destinations (like restaurants, hotels, spas and boutiques) dedicated to the Eco Design Lifestyle. Luxury Eco Tours are available for locations around the country with self-guided podcasts or with printed guides online. For more information go to www.lexus.com/hybridliving. ■



LS 600h L LOGBOOK NOTES

- Barbara and Bill had the LS 460 AWD for a week, and the LS 600h L at its launch event. We had the LS 600h L for a week.
- We first pulled it out into the street to swap parking slots. The gas engine never started: it ran in total silence, and in a big sedan like this, that's very cool.
- Playing the gauges is a challenge in some hybrids, but it's not hard to keep this gauge in the ECO range, or even toward the charging range. When you goose it into the power range, you get so much power, so fast, you don't even feel like you're blowing your reserve (though you surely are).
- Comfort and sport settings: like B&B, we realized it was a tiny bit soft, though a pretty nice ride even on comfort. Changed over to sport, same as it turns out they had.
- There's enough power on tap that you can accelerate strongly and solidly and stay in the ECO range, easily.
- It's so cool cruising around in silence in this kind of size and comfort, that you actually enjoy doing it, unlike the sort of self-challenge with small hybrids.
- Nice suspension. Long wheelbase probably helps, but even one by one on speed-bumps, it performs extremely well, actually a little better on the front than the back.
- Despite being drivers to the core, we had the same thought Barbara and Bill did, since this is the "L" we wish we could let somebody else drive it, so we could try out that big back seat. One more great trick.
- We try out the back seat... spacious! And yet it handles so well, with AWD.
- It shares an annoyance with other Toyotas: if you don't move the shifter to P, shut off power and open the door in their preferred sequence, it will beep at you until you do it all over again their way.
- Previously in the little HS hybrid we noted you seldom get caught short for power, and in this one you never do. You're cruising along in ECO and freebie modes, and suddenly have to hop on a better lane or breeze through a corner before the light turns, and you don't think twice. Powerful.
- Cruising surface streets, we're at about 1500 rpm in D mode. Knocked over to S and bumped it to above 3000 rpm. We're doing very well with fuel mileage in the D mode, so we change back. You don't *feel* a big difference other than when you first shift.
- In our week overall, we generally go to Drive, forget about the S setting on the transmission. The suspension stays set on Sport. Considering how high the tach jacks up when you go to the S on the transmission, we'd recommend Sport for suspension, the economical D setting on the transmission, and enjoy yourself. -JS