

Formula

Muscle car 5.0L V8 performance, Euro sport sedan style and finish, Japanese build quality BY JOE SAGE

There are two kinds of Lexus models with “F” in their name, but make no mistake: only an F car is truly an F car. This is the GS F, the top performance model of their rear-drive-based GS lineup—not to be confused with “F Sport.”

By comparison, a GS 300 or GS 350 “F Sport” has uptuned suspension and brakes, but the same four-cylinder turbo or V6 as a non-F Sport 300 or 350 (rounding out the lineup are regular GS 300 and GS 350 models and a GS 450h Hybrid).

F vs F Sport can be superficially confusing, but it's essentially the same thing Audi, BMW and Mercedes-Benz have done with S, M and AMG.

The full-blown GS F is a whole different animal, with a 5.0-liter V8 and more dramatic performance upgrades throughout: adaptive variable suspension, bigger brakes and generally top-of-the-line features, finishes and details with a sporty edge.

A wild card: if you want all-wheel-drive, only the GS 350 (or GS 350 F Sport) V6 offers that. The high-performance GS F sends its high torque to the rear wheels only. Since rear-wheel drive is the full GS lineup's core trait, anyway, that's just fine.

When we think “5.0L V8,” we think immediately of Ford Mustang, which has had such an engine for decades (originally known as the 302, in the era of cubic inches), currently in the 460-hp GT. But the Lexus GS is a four-door sedan, so a better

comparison for the GS F might be the 485-hp 6.4L HEMI V8 Dodge Charger SRT.

Rip-roarin' up a freeway on-ramp in the 467-hp V8 rear-drive GS F, you'll be equally impressed by its smooth application of power and the meaty acoustics that accompany that.

The GS F has normal, sport, sport plus and eco modes available (though it is plenty sporty in any), plus an “eco” indicator that gives you a pat on the head when you let off the gas in sportier modes. Switching among them is easier than most, once you discover the control knob's thinking. Sport plus gives you a real kick in the pants, but it also boosts the acoustics—if you're trying not to wake up the neighborhood, one quick flick to the left gets you into tranquil eco mode (and can be done eyes-off). We found the car's tracking could be a little loose for a rear-driver, and sport settings did help that.

As with any current Lexus, the weak point is the display system's joystick controller, which has all the precision of a loose tooth, making navigating among features a maddening experience. This has been improved some, but not enough.

We'd love to be able to get any Lexus F that's stripped down for just performance, as so many of the tech features just get in the way. We did take the many steps needed to turn off the system's annoying beeps, but decided to live with one iPod and just concentrate on the joys of driving—and there's something to be said for that. At this, the GS F excels. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	5.0L DOHC 32v elec VVT V8
DRIVETRAIN	RWD
HP/TORQUE	467 hp / 389 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	8-spd sport direct shift auto / paddles
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	4.5 sec / 168 mph
STEERING	elec power, speed-sense coax rack & pinion, power assist, F sport mode adjustable
SUSPENSION	Linear Adaptive Variable Suspension: F: dbl wishbone, high-mount upper arms, high-rate coils w bound stopper, large-diameter hollow stblzr bar R: multi-link w low-mount upper arms, high-rate coils w bound stopper
BRAKES	ventilated F: 15.0" 6-piston; R: 13.6" 4-piston F/R: aluminum calipers, high-friction pads
WHEELS/TIRES	F: 19x9 / 255/35ZR19 R: 19x10 / 275/35ZR19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	193.5 in / 112.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	36.8 ft
SEATING CAPACITY	five
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.9 / 37.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	40.6 / 32.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY	14.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION / WEIGHT	53/47 / 4034 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	17.4 gal
FUEL / MPG	(prem) 16/24/19 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$84,350
WHEELS	19-in BBS hand-polished split-10-spoke forged alloy wheels600
COLOR HEADS-UP DISPLAY900
PREMIUM AUDIO SYSTEM	835-watt Mark Levinson audio w 17 speakers, 7.1 Premium Surround Sound, DVD/CD/MP3 player, Clari-Fi1380
ORANGE BREMBO BRAKE CALIPERS300
(PKG): Trunk mat, cargo net, wheel locks, rear bumper applique, key gloves330
DESTINATION CHARGE995
TOTAL	\$88,855

