

Numbers are only half the story BY JOE SAGE

If there's one thing that has come from this era of electrification, it's a burgeoning understanding of the value of torque. Case in point: when we received the Lexus NX 300h hybrid crossover for a week and saw its 154-hp engine rating (especially coming right out of a week with the 471-hp Lexus LC 500), we weren't expecting high performance.

Even at 194 hp, gasoline engine-electric combined (see sidebar), we had dropped horsepower by almost 60 percent from the V8 LC, but we had also dropped price by about the same. Despite this being a crossover, we had also dropped weight by more than 20 percent, though despite this being a hybrid, we had only gained 20 percent highway fuel mileage—however, city fuel mileage was more than doubled by moving to the NX 300h.

But the NX hybrid proved to be a bit of a rocket, all due to the immediate full dose of torque delivered by an electrified powertrain as soon as your foot depresses the pedal. Interestingly, total torque is not one of their published specifications. But it is there by the bucketload.

The NX's drive personality also benefits from its visual persona, especially in an unassuming coat of Nebula Gray paint. You know what they say about assuming, and assuming this is unassuming would be a big mistake. It's a sleeper—all the better to top-perform while laying low.

That sleeper persona gave us studies in relativ-

ity among our fellow travelers, such as choosing the freeway on-ramp with only a Corvette in it, rather than the one full of hybrids and econoboxes—and wailing right on up it with the 'Vette. Someone else actively tried to block us from a freeway lane change, so we gunned it to simply gain a spot well in front. Its stated 9.1-second zero-to-60 time and 112-mph top speed do not suggest any of this, but it's all on tap at normal cruising speeds.

And we surprised ourselves, entering a busy surface artery, waiting for a big gap in traffic, not expecting much pep out of this thing, finally getting that gap, only to realize we hadn't needed to wait—the NX kicks itself in the pants very nicely.

As our logbook repeatedly noted, "the numbers lie. It's ridiculously peppy. On the freeway, nail it and it just goes!" People will tell you all day long that electric torque is the big difference in the power experience, and you'll tell yourself this, too. We never tried it with four people, nor with a load of cargo, but the torque should apply the same.

The additional dimension is that it's a Lexus. We surmise we surprise some mainstream brand drivers with this—perhaps surprised a Lexus could even be a sleeper, or probably concluding, well, it's a Lexus, no wonder it's hot—confirming Lexus has delivered on their badge promise in both performance and its premium technology and features, all in \$39,000 compact crossover. Surprise! ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE2.5L Atkinson 4 EFI, DOHC 16v dual VVT-i	
HYBRID SYSTEM ...series/parallel system w gasoline engine, hi-voltage battery & elec motors	
MOTOR GENERATORS MG1 : AC 650V, perm magnet: generator, engine start, charges hybrid battery;	
MG2 : AC 650V, perm magnet: drives front wheels;	
MGR (rear): AC 650V, 67 hp (50kW): drive rear wheels; (MG2 & MGR): regeneration during braking.	
BATTERY PACK244.8V 204-cell sealed Ni-MH	
DRIVETRAIN"full-time all-weather drive" AWD	
HP/TORQUEgasoline engine 154 hp / 152 lb-ft	
TOTAL SYSTEM POWER194 hp	
TRANSMISSIONelectronic CVT, power split for electronic all- or front-wheel-drive control system	
0-T0-62 / TOP SPEED9.1 sec / 112 mph (lim)	
SUSPENSIONF: MacPherson strut, coils; R: trailing arm double wishbone, coils	
STEERINGelectric power steering	
BRAKESF: vented disc / R: disc	
WHEELS / TIRES(std) 17x7.0 / 225/65R17	
LENGTH / WHEELBASE182.3 / 104.7 in	
GROUND CLEARANCE6.7 in	
TURNING CIRCLE39.8 ft	
APPROACH / DEPARTURE28.7° / 24.5°	
HEADROOM (F/R)(w moonroof) 37.4 / 38.1 in	
LEGROOM (F/R)42.8 / 36.1 in	
CARGO CAPACITY16.8 / 53.7 cu.ft	
TOW CAPACITY1500 lb	
WEIGHT4180 lb	
FUEL / CAPACITY87 octane or higher / 14.8 gal	
MPG33/30/31 (city/hwy/comb)	
BASE PRICE	\$39,070
PANORAMIC VIEW BACKUP MONITOR800
INSIDE MIRROR : elec-chromic auto-dim, Homelink	.125
TRIPLE-BEAM LED HEADLAMPS W AFS	1515
NAV SYSTEM : 10.3" display, 10-speaker premium audio, Lexus Dynamic Nav (w 3-year trial)	1860
INTUITIVE PARK ASSIST W AUTO BRAKE	535
POWER REAR DOOR W KICK SENSOR	550
PREMIUM PKG : 18" wheels, heated-vented front seats, prem LED DRLs, pwr tilt/slide moonroof, memory mirrors & driver seat, lumbar, BSM w RCTA	1270
DOOR EDGE GUARDS	140
PAINT PROTECTION FILM, 3M	429
CARGO MAT/NET, WHEEL LOCKS, KEY GLOVE	183
DESTINATION CHARGE	1025
TOTAL	\$49,702

