

A beauty and a beast BY JOE SAGE

The Lexus LC offers a compelling lineup in just three variations—a completely reengineered convertible for 2023 and a coupe, the sexy streamlined shape you see here, tip to tail, with either of two drivetrains. All are rear-wheel-drive.

The conventional 471-hp LC 500 with 5.0-liter V8 in the LC 500 Coupe has fuel economy ratings of 16/25/19 mpg (city/hwy/combined), 15/25/18 in an LC 500 Convertible, while an LC 500h with a 3.5-liter V6-based series/parallel hybrid system has lower horsepower, 354 combined, but significantly higher fuel mileage at 26/34/29. Each has absolute advantages—you can't go wrong.

The Lexus LC 500 is a glorious machine—gorgeous, powerful, smooth and accurate. But it can also be a very frustrating user experience. Its user

interface details can be difficult to set up and unsteady to adjust. There are indications that Lexus is starting to realize this and, even more belatedly, has started to do something about it.

Updated binnacle instruments and steering wheel controls (along with a few key features via instrument panel buttons) are well done. Most are digital, while many look analog, and core dials slide mechanically to change menu interfaces.

The main screen is another matter, suffering from uncertain layering with key features buried deeply, while its console controller has more room for improvement. We're pretty sure Lexus has been aware, for years, that this interface has been problematic, correcting it just discreetly and incrementally, perhaps hoping we wouldn't notice there

had been a problem. They started years ago with an uncertain joystick on the console that generated unpredictable reactions on the screen, darting hither and yon as frustration built from an inability to aim accurately or land anywhere reliably. They finally replaced this with an almost equally finicky console touchpad, but it still had a long way to go. The good news is, the whole area has evolved a bit more in some other Lexus models we've driven recently. But it has not, yet, in the LC. Presumably this is due to the LC's lower volume, but given its high price, it should get more attention.

Our setup time was lengthy, repeated, distract-ed and highly frustrating. Our drive time, however, was magnificent. Once in motion, it was hard to not just keep going and going, which is exactly what we did, in multiple long sessions.

Optional rear wheel steering is a complex bit of

engineering that provides its subtle improvements transparently, as any good magic trick should.

Drive mode options, accessible via stylish cylindrical controllers to either side of the binnacle, amused us with three categories: powertrain and chassis, as you'd expect, but what else, brakes, you might think? No, climate. We stuck with normal for power, changed to sport for chassis, and stuck with normal for climate, as energy-saving eco is rarely a good climate choice in Arizona.

We wanted to adjust overly active lane keeping, which took some digging, then only offering two levels, but no off. We went with the lesser. Another was a bit of a power-blip effect, which we could not find specifically, thus seeming to be part of the drive mode algorithm. One oddity we had in driving performance from this came as we crossed two very familiar pronounced rain troughs on a major boulevard, giving it a little goose to keep the nose up, as we have ten thousand times before,

with the system failing to respond—until after we had already crossed, at which point it overreacted.

But when we drove long country highway and two-lane miles, just focused on the drive, it was all pretty great. Our drives were spirited, yet our fuel mileage was well above 20 mpg over our whole combination of local and highway driving.

It's a nominal four-seater, but as is typical in such performance coupes, the rear seats are of little practical use. We used the trunk for groceries and gear without realizing it is just 5.4 cubic feet.

Ours was almost \$107,000 with upgrades, and we couldn't help but wonder how much it would be for just the basic car and driving experience, with all those frustratingly implemented layers removed. But good news. Rumor has it there will be a vastly improved interface in the next iteration. We hope they make a clean sweep of it, and soon. Then this car would be a superstar at this price. And if none of that bothers you, then it's already a superstar now. ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Toyota, Aichi, Japan
BUILD	.....unitized steel body w steel front & rear subframes
ROWS / SEATS	.....two / four
ENGINE	.....5.0L V8, 32v DOHC, EFI, dir inj 4-stroke gasoline Superior, dual VVT-i (variable valve timing w intell), alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....471 hp / 398 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....12.3:1
TRANSMISSION	.....10-spd Sport Direct Shift auto w paddle shift & manual mode
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD
REAR DIFFERENTIAL	.....Torsen Limited Slip
0-100 MPH	.....4.4 sec
TOP SPEED	.....(mfg est; elect lim) 168 mph
SUSPENSION	.....F: double joint multilink; R: multilink
STEERING	.....elec power, vehicle speed-sensing coaxial rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 15.7 vented, six-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction brake pads; R: 14.1 vented, four-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction brake pads
WHEELS	.....(pkg) 21-in forged alloy w polished finish & gloss black accents
TIRES	.....F: 245/40RF21; R: 275/35RF21
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....187.4 / 113.0 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....(w active rear steer) 34.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w/carbon rf) 36.8 / 32.2 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.0 / 32.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....5.4 cu.ft
WEIGHT / DISTRIB	.....4340 lb / 54/46%
COEFFICIENT OF DRAG	.....(Cd) 0.33
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....premium unl / 21.7 gal
MPG	.....16/25/19 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$93,450
PREMIUM PAINT: Cadmium Orange	.....595
AUDIO: Mark Levinson 13-speaker Reference Surround Sound system	.....1220
HEADS-UP DISPLAY	.....900
DYNAMIC HANDLING PKG: 21-in forged alloy wheels w polished finish & gloss black accents, Torsen limited slip differential, active rear steering, variable gear-ratio steering, speed-activated rear wing, intuitive parking assist, alcantara sport seats, alcantara headliner, carbon fiber roof, carbon fiber door scuff plate	.....9570
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1150
TOTAL	.....\$106,885

(Note: prices have increased; see chart.)

2023 LEXUS LC 500 LINEUP

LC 500	.....▼ \$ 94,600
LC 500h Hybrid	.....100,600
LC 500 Convertible	.....102,650