

Lexus LC is in just its seventh year, though it certainly feels like longer—partly due to six or eight years of gestation, including development of its rare, high-dollar supercar sibling, the LFA, as well as a couple of concept cars that foreshadowed either or both.

You know you want an LC. But which? Although specific combinations have varied over time, there are generally choices between coupe or convertible, and between V8 and hybrid V6—but not always either of either. As of now (see lower right), you can have either as a V8, but coupe-only as a hybrid. That latter is what we are driving here.

It's the same build as the very first LC we drove, in 2018, headlined as having "supercar presence and econocar fuel mileage." While that refers to miles per gallon, a price tag around \$100k may not sound like an econocar. But recall that the LFA it echoes cost three or four times that (and is now worth eight to ten times). Surprisingly, the LC price

remains very close to the same, today, in the face of inflation. In other words, this is a triple bargain.

Commonalities and contrasts within LC's many variables offer insights and surprises. Anyone will compare power, price and thirst between the V8 and hybrid. And this turns into an adventure.

Purchase prices of the three basic versions are very close together (even special editions this year aren't that much higher), allowing almost anyone to choose purely by preference. From there, apples and oranges kick in quickly. The V8 has 471 horsepower, the V6 engine just 295—but then the hybrid's contribution brings it to 354. (Torque for the hybrid add-on is not stated, though may likely be an even more dramatic bonus.)

But the big-battery-bearing hybrid must weigh more, no? Well, just 80 pounds more, fairly negligible for vehicles already well over 4,000 pounds.

Acceleration and top speed specs will be bragging points for some, close enough for others, es-

pecially out in the real world, with zero-to-60 time stated as 4.4 seconds for the V8, 4.7 for the hybrid. Top speed is along the same lines—168 mph V8, 155 for the hybrid. Dang close for "not a V8."

Tiny percentages, those. But back to the factor that comes to most minds at the first mention of hybrid—fuel mileage. Despite such similarities in weight and speed, the V8 is rated 16/24/18 mpg (city/highway/combined), the hybrid at 26/33/29, a whopping 37 to 62 percent or so higher.

Seen as an economical supercar or sports car by some, Lexus LC is more widely considered a grand tourer (an actual GT). And for this, high fuel mileage is great. Then there's another wild card. Though the fuel tank with either engine is large—over 20 gallons—the hybrid's is a half-gallon larger, adding up to a win-win for economy and range.

But here's a tradeoff. Both trunks are very small, the V8 a hair over and the hybrid a hair under five cubic feet (5.2 vs 4.7). Although (or because) they

squeezed a larger fuel tank into the hybrid, its luggage volume was slashed by a half a cubic foot, or 10 percent. This emphasizes a paradox of the LC—it's a fuel-frugal, long-range grand tourer, but one in which you have to pack quite lightly.

Differences go on and on. The differential ratio runs 15 percent higher on the hybrid. Ground clearance is also higher on the hybrid—5.5 vs 5.2 inches—yet the drag coefficient is the same on both.

Variables may present tough decisions for some people, but be super easy or ignored by others.

Even once you've settled on major drivetrain and body style alternatives, ordering your LC is its own adventure. As you'll note in the sidebar, ours has a number of add-ons, and as we reviewed them, we figured we could live without quite a few—the headliner, the roof (although lighter is better for both weight and center of gravity, important on such a car), surely the scuff plates. But then we realized that even our broad array didn't change the general price neighborhood all that much.

Of particular note is the \$3200 fee for Bespoke Build Package. As quoted in the sidebar, it promis-

es the chance to option your vehicle, but then don't they all? Confusion sets in when you puzzle over the fact that you paid for Bespoke but also paid for options. (Another mystery was how our optional wheels could possibly be just \$40.)

We reviewed this in depth—via press materials, the consumer site, a few Lexus forums—and could write a book about what we learned (or didn't). Forums show confusion and understandable misunderstanding on the part of purchasers, but also among dealers they had tried to work with.

Though remaining unclear, glimmers of understanding seem to come from a few angles.

One is that in Japan, a buyer typically visits a dealership, drives the sole sample they have on hand, then orders what they want. Factory orders are more of a relatively rare exception here (they mean waiting, plus dealers will understandably always steer you toward what's on the lot).

Number two, as best we could conclude, is that buying the Bespoke package is not a tangible item, like options themselves, but rather a gateway to-

(cont'd)

The 2024 LC is largely a carryover model. New this year are a 12.3-inch high-def touchscreen and two new colors (Ultrasonic Blue Mica, as on our sample, and Copper Crest, a great Arizona color), as well as various additional tech and wheel upgrades.

Precision head-turner

BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Toyota, Aichi, Japan
BODY / FRAME	unitized steel body w steel front & rear subframes
SEATING CAPACITY	four
HYBRID POWER SYSTEM	series/parallel system w gasoline engine & elec motors
ENGINE	3.5L V6, 24v DOHC, dual VVT-i
HP/TORQUE	295 hp / 258.2 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	13.0:1
DRIVETRAIN / V6 ENGINE	RWD
ELECTRIC MOTORS	
FRONT	perm magnet synchronous
REAR	perm magnet synchronous
HYBRID BATTERY PACK	lithium-ion 84-cell, nominal 310.8V, system 650V
TOTAL SYSTEM POWER	354 hp
TRANSMISSION	two-gearset multistage hybrid system: planetary-type continuously variable transmission (CVT) from Lexus Hybrid Synergy Drive, with a unique 4-spd automatic transmission added
DIFFERENTIAL RATIO	(500h hybrid) 3.357
0-100 / TOP SPEED	4.7 sec / 155 mph
SUSPENSION	F: dbl-joint multilink; R: multi-link
STEERING	
vehicle speed-sensing coaxial rack & pinion, pwr assist	
BRAKES	
F: 15.7 vented, 6-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction pads; R: 14.1 vented, 4-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction pads	
WHEELS	
opt 21-inch staggered 10-spoke forged alloy gloss black & machined finish	
TIRES	
F: 245/40 R21; R: 275/35 R21 summer	
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	
187.4 / 113.0	
GROUND CLEARANCE	
5.5 in	
TURNING CIRCLE	
35.4 ft	
HEADROOM (F/R)	
(CFRP roof) 36.8 / 32.2 in	
LEGROOM (F/R)	
42.0 / 32.5 in	
CARGO CAPACITY	
(500h hyb) 4.7 cu.ft	
WEIGHT	
4420 lb	
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION (F/R)	
52 / 48%	
FUEL / CAPACITY	
91 oct / (hyb) 22.2 gal	
MPG	
(hyb) 26/33/29 (city/hwy/comb)	
BASE PRICE	\$101,250
BESPOKE BUILD PKG: "allowing customers to configure their vehicle with a mix of performance and styling components like the wheels, spoiler, roof and exterior/interior trim and colors"	
3200	
PREMIUM PAINT: Ultrasonic Blue Mica	
595	
WHEELS: 21-in forged gloss black metallic alloy machined finish	
40	
ALCANTARA-TRIMMED SPORT SEATS	
nc	
ALCANTARA HEADLINER	
1700	
AUDIO: Mark Levinson premium	
1220	
SPEED-ACTIVATED REAR WING	
995	
CARBON FIBER ROOF	
2400	
CARBON FIBER DOOR SCUFF PLATES	
600	
DESTINATION CHARGE	
1350	
TOTAL	\$113,350
<i>Sticker price varies from most current, below.</i>	

2024 LEXUS LC LINEUP

LC 500: V8, 471 hp, 398 lb-ft, 10-spd auto, RWD	
LC 500h: V6, 295 hp, 258.2 lb-ft, multistage hybrid transmission, elec motors front/rear, total 354 hp	
LC 500	\$99,300
LC 500h	▼ 102,600
LC 500 Convertible	106,800
LC 500 Inspiration Series	116,700
LC 500 Convert Inspiration Series	121,900

ward the ability to do options. Since even this is puzzling, against the familiar approach, we've tentatively concluded that it lets you unbundle individual items from standard packages. If you compare packages individually, on anything, you'll find many possibilities over a very wide price range. Generally, a couple of details may be lacking on one, while a couple of unneeded items will be included in another, forcing multiple bundles. At \$3200 for the privilege, going Bespoke could end up costing more, it seems, but at least you won't have something you don't even want on your car. (As for our \$40 wheels, this is surely a broken-out cost differential from similar standard ones.)

These conclusions are speculative. Feel free to dig into it further. Realistically, it will seldom come up, as buying one off the lot remains most likely, and if the total price is fine, you're good to go.

As throughout the Lexus lineup, the era of wiggly and uncertain joysticks and trackpads controlling the screen from the console are pretty much behind us. Details linger, such as one heated seat button on the console to access two heated seat inputs on the screen, but mostly it's pure screen-touch now, with a handful of hard knobs, switches and wheel-mounted redundancies as appropriate.

All that analysis aside, this car begs to be driven, and who are we to say no?

It takes no time at all to start enjoying the Lexus LC 500h hybrid. Power and performance are immediate, featuring precision throttle and shifts, highly responsive steering, and advanced brakes front and rear. Is this a lot to get used to? Not really, not at all. In many a sports, muscle or supercar, the adjustment is significant, but not in this. The LC is engineered to be noticeably different while also noticeably welcome and immediately familiar, the most positive combination you could hope for.

The hybrid does not have that V8 growl, but you don't miss it. Instead, it has a high-tech yet throaty whine, a very high-end European type of growl.

And it turns heads from the get-go.

Aside from routine daily driving, we took our LC

500h on two longer runs. The first was up into the outer fringes of the northeast valley—an adventure in elevation climb, initially through multiple changes in lane count, in very aggressive traffic, with heavy construction disruption added to the mix in spots. And this roadworthy grand tourer was great in all of it—power, braking, steering, everything—with over-the-shoulder visibility also remarkably good from inside its small greenhouse.

Our reward was in the curvy, hilly two-lanes at the top. Given our general philosophy that vehicles should be optimum as delivered, and that drive modes suggest they are not, we were having so much fun, we had to ask: what else have ya got?

It turns out that while standard mode is fine, we greatly enjoyed its Sport S+ mode, which notably tightened up suspension, provided a prompt power curve upon acceleration (even from a dead stop on an uphill), handled downshifts skillfully, and even pumped up the sound effects nicely. We did use paddle shifts more than typically, in some of the hills and curves, at first surprised to see how quickly it reverted back out of them. But its clever dual-gearset setup (see transmission specs) can defy assumptions made per gear-equivalent readouts in the binnacle, proving its own intelligence.

We had expected to prefer standard mode once we were back in town, and it may well be the better-adapted alternative, but we instead found ourselves still enjoying Sport S+ even in traffic.

Nobody wants to bring a race car to a traffic jam, but our second big drive was up I-17, which we've been avoiding due to disruptive construction, for dinner at Rock Springs Café. Despite this car's natural habitat of open road, its shifting precision and cabin visibility made it a breeze in the most crowded backups (while its power and accuracy allowed opportune lane changes as needed).

Is our Lexus LC worth \$113 grand? Truth be told, that's a big bragging point. When you already have somebody's admiring eye, which you will, tell them that—and if they're familiar with the price of most supercars, they'll ooh and aah all the more. ■

