

Pampering Lexus LS Is Fuss-Free Sedan

Ann M. Job, For The Associated Press

After decades of top reliability ratings, the Lexus LS 460 remains the quintessential serene, no-fuss, pampering, large, luxury sedan.

In fact, the most recent J.D. Power and Associates Dependability Study noted the LS had the fewest owner-reported problems in the auto industry and ranked above vehicles from Mercedes-Benz, Audi and BMW.

Now, for 2013, the LS 460 is available in new F Sport trim with a bolder face, crisper steering and a suspension that allows a more dynamic ride.

Among the F Sport-only features: Bolstered, yet luxurious, leather front seats, Brembo performance brakes, paddle shifters for manually changing gears, aluminum trim inside in place of some wood trim and standard black Alcantara ceiling material.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$72,840 for a base, rear-wheel drive, 2013 LS 460 with 386-horsepower V-8 and eight-speed automatic transmission.

The lowest-priced 2013 LS with all-wheel drive is \$75,785, and the F-Sport has a starting retail price of \$82,840 with rear-wheel drive and \$85,735 with all-wheel drive.

Note that even F-Sport models have the same 386-horsepower, naturally aspirated, gasoline V-8 as the base model, and long-wheelbase LS sedans and a hybrid also are available at higher price points.

Competitors include the well-known, large luxury sedans from Europe.

For example, the rear-wheel drive 2013 Mercedes S550 with 429-horsepower bi-turbo V-8 and seven-speed automatic transmission starts at \$95,905, while a 2013 Audi A8 with all-wheel drive, 420-horsepower, twin-turbocharged V-8 and eight-speed automatic transmissions starts at \$81,795.

Both the S-Class and A8 are available with more fuel-efficient V-6s, too.

The LS is Lexus' flagship sedan, but U.S. sales fell 13 percent last year to 8,345.

The reason, obviously, isn't the car's quality, which is well known — from its precise, small gaps between outer sheet metal to the 38-day, 67-step process just to make perfect Shimamoku layers of striped wood as an optional steering wheel design.

Indeed, the details and craftsmanship of the LS can impress many a passenger.

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As an example, the analog clock on the dashboard has two types of contrasting aluminum and uses GPS to maintain accurate time, no matter the time zone.

Fog lamps aren't the typical round shape. They're subtle and vertical so as to better harmonize with the new Lexus spindle grille shape. And, these fog lights are energy-efficient and high-tech light-emitting diode lamps.

There's even a hand rest on the far right of the center console, right where the driver needs it, for operating the cursor-mouse control for the sizable, 12.3-inch center display screen.

On first glance, this hand rest might come across as the stub at the top of a retro car phone. But it's actually a smart and helpful resting spot to help ensure accurate movement of the cursor-mouse for commands.

This is just one illustration of how the complexity and new technology in the LS are handled thoughtfully in this big sedan, and there's no stressing to find controls or change settings.

In fact, the LS appears to be one of the best luxury cars to allow the driver to operate the car and gradually learn the features, in contrast to other cars that immediately and frustratingly demand attention and driver tutorials.

It's true the 4.6-liter, double overhead cam V-8 in the LS has fewer horses than do the competing V-8s.

But the LS doesn't feel underpowered, even during hard acceleration, where strong engine sounds accompany the smooth rush of 347 or 367 foot-pounds of peak torque coming on.

The different torque ratings depend on whether the car is all-wheel drive (lower torque) or rear-wheel drive. Either way, peak torque is reached by a decent 4,100 rpm. Yes, the LS isn't snorting and slamming bodies roughly back in the seats, but the performance feels ample, just the same.

Alas, even with lower horsepower and torque, the 2013 LS 460 isn't great on fuel. With a federal government rating of 16 miles per gallon in city driving and 23 mpg on the highway, the 2013 LS compares with the 17/28-mpg rating of the 2013 A8 with more powerful V-8.

The test LS 460 F Sport with all-wheel drive averaged just 16.3 mpg in travel that was 65 percent in the city. This translated into a range of just 360 miles on the 22.2-gallon tank. And, since Lexus requires premium gasoline, a fillup was more than \$80.

The test LS 460 F Sport with all-wheel drive had the F-Sport's Drive Mode system that allowed changes to the electronic engine mapping, steering responsiveness and suspension settings.

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The Eco mode was comforting to have, though it didn't seem to make an appreciable difference in the test car compared with the normal setting.

But the driver noticed more steering assist was needed and a stronger powertrain response when Sport-Plus was selected.

The Sport-Plus setting didn't change the LS into a BMW 7-Series, but it made a compliant-riding, 16.7-foot-long sedan feel more maneuverable and poised on twisty mountain roads.

The LS weighs more than 4,200 pounds, and no matter what speed it travels, it has a heavy, solid feel.

The test LS wasn't the long-wheelbase version, but the back seat still felt spacious, and legroom back there seemed much more than the reported 35.8 inches.

Legroom in front was nearly 44 inches, with the front seats back all the way on their tracks.

Standard safety items include knee air bags for both front passengers and adaptive headlights.

The 2013 LS is likely to follow in the tire tracks of its predecessors, in terms of reliability. Thus, it is a recommended buy of Consumer Reports, which says predicted reliability should be above average.

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