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Lexus GS 300h – Road Test

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Hybrid Power – You Know it Makes Sense – Toyota and Lexus Know how.
Lexus GS 300h tested by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Toyota and Lexus have long been the stalwarts, you could say the pioneers, of using hybrid technology for some of their passenger car ranges to reduce CO2 emissions, improve fuel economy and boost performance. Where they led others now follow.

The growth in Alternatively Fuelled Vehicles (AFVs), as the industry calls them, covering hybrids, petrol/diesel hybrids, plug-ins, pure electric, hydrogen and fuel-cell has been



significant. Last year in the UK AFV sales grew by 22% to almost 89,000 new car registrations. In March 2017, the new '17 plate' registration month, AFV sales achieved a 31% growth and for the first three months of this year nearly 33,500 AFVs have been sold in the UK. It's a similar growth pattern in Europe as well.

Global sales of Toyota and their luxury brand Lexus models have passed the 10 million mark since the first Prius hybrid was launched in 1999. Today the two brands offer 33 different hybrid model types sold in 90 countries worldwide.

In the UK more than 250,000 Toyota/Lexus hybrids have been sold since the Prius was launched. Lexus was the first luxury car brand to offer hybrid power and currently they make up 99% of Lexus UK sales through eight different model ranges.

So apart from a few turbocharged petrol powered models in their range, hybrid models rule-the-roost and Lexus is definitely a diesel-free brand. Hybrid powered models have resulted in six years of record UK sales for Lexus.

The Lexus GS is designated as a D-segment, premium sports four door saloon and the only one of its type to offer the choice of two full hybrid powertrains - the GS 300h and GS 450h. My test version, the 300h Executive Edition, is the latest addition to the line-up. At this point I should mention there is also a very high performance non-hybrid GS F variant with a 5.0 litre V8, 471 bhp naturally aspirated petrol powered version on sale at £73,375, but that is a very small seller in this country.

The core GS 300h range starts with the new Executive Edition priced at £36,125 and runs through the additional spec levels of Luxury, F Sport, Premier and Premier 19" to £46,235. The more powerful 450h levels are F Sport and Premier and Premier 19" costing from £53,050 to £54,640.

Volume selling competitor ranges include the Audi A6, BMW 5 Series, Jaguar XF and Mercedes E-Class. Like its competitors the GS range is targeted mainly at business user-chooser customers and company car drivers, which accounts for the wide pricing structure.



This ensures there is a rung on the pricing ladder to suit each level of potential buyer, both business and of course free-thinking retail buyers who prefer something less obvious and more exclusive than the German brands.



The GS 450h has a 3.5 litre V6 288 bhp petrol engine and a compact 197 bhp water-cooled electric motor, producing a top speed of 155 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 5.9 seconds. The Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 46.3 mpg with 141 g/km of CO2 emissions so VED road tax costs £190 First Year rate and then £130 thereafter with Benefit-in-Kind tax rated as 27%.



Whereas the most appealing model cost-wise and the best selling GS 300h models have a 2.5 litre four cylinder 178 bhp petrol engine and a 141 bhp electric motor. Top speed is 119 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 9.0 seconds. In addition to its comprehensive specification the new Executive Edition is even more impressive for its low running and tax costs. The official Combined Cycle is 64.2 mpg with CO2 emissions from 104 g/km so VED costs £130 every year and BiK tax is 19%. The low tax costs are ideal in this sector for both retail customers and company car drivers.

Both the GS 300h and 450h saloons have an electronic continuously variable CVT auto transmission as standard with drive to the rear wheels. The full hybrid system can operate in electric power only mode for a relatively short distance as well as continuously working in tandem with the petrol engine to maximise fuel efficiency and it provides added performance during acceleration. During deceleration and under braking the electric motor works as a generator and feeds the high capacity battery. The electronically controlled CVT auto gearbox has a six-step gearchange function which gives the characteristics of a conventional 'automatic'. In addition there are four normal driving modes of Eco, Normal, Sport and Snow plus an EV mode for short distance driving using only electric power. There is no plug-in electric facility for these GS hybrid models which would extend the electric power only driving range and lower CO2 emissions further, but it would increase the price of the vehicle significantly.

During my week of test driving, using all types of roads and traffic conditions, the real-life fuel economy figures was 47.2 mpg. Given the GS 300h has a 2.5 litre petrol engine and the significant size and weight of the car, it was impressive and on a par with diesel model fuel consumption in this sector. It was still not very close to the official Combined Cycle 64.2 mpg figure but the economy potential comes in the form of tax savings. Insurance is rated as Group 26E and the car is covered by a three year/ 60,000 mile warranty which oddly is less than Toyota's 5-year/100,000 mile warranty which covers their hybrid models as well...

Ride comfort was good, providing a composed performance and generally ironing out the impacts from potholes and poor road surfaces. Road noise intrusion was minimal and the



engine hushed even at legal maximum cruising speeds. In the handling department the GS 300h isn't as agile as its German competitors, it feels a large and lazy car, more suited for effortless, tireless comfortable 'cruising' than sports handling.



That said, overall it is an easy car to live with. It looks good with its Lexus trademark large spindle front grille flanked by three-lamp LED headlights clusters. At 4,880 mm (16.01 ft) in length and 1,840 mm (6.04 ft) wide it looks a substantial sized four door saloon with a stylish coupé roofline and wide haunches. At the rear is a 450 litre (15.89 cu.ft) boot which is not the easiest to load because of its internal 'T' shape dictated by the battery storage and rear suspension design. The boot floor is significantly lower than the rear sill so heavy items have to be lifted up and over and down into the boot.



Inside the cockpit is driver focussed and some will find it looks a bit 'old-school' compared to the de-cluttered fascia interiors of new generation minimalist layouts, such as the latest BMW 5 Series as an example. However it looks and feels of high quality and the centrally fascia mounted analogue clock harks back to iconic classic motoring days. There is a large 12.3-inch multimedia display screen centrally positioned within the fascia, which allows access to the numerous technologies and connectivity systems on-board. It's simple to use although the Remote Touch controller - similar to a computer mouse - I found to be erratic and too sensitive at times. The sat-nav system also had niggles, showing speed restrictions where they weren't any and on several occasions offered detours because of heavy traffic which again didn't manifest itself, so it was probably due for a software update. The DAB radio and sound system however was superb.



Although the Executive Edition spec model I tried was the entry-point model the equipment level was first class. It comes as standard with immaculate leather upholstery, heated front seats, Premium Navigation, LED headlamps, smart entry with push-button start, parking sensors, 17-inch alloy wheels, Drive Mode select, Vehicle Dynamics selector, electric windows and door mirrors, air-con and much more. Also included on all the latest GS models is the Lexus Safety System+ which includes Pre-Crash Safety with pedestrian detection, Adaptive Cruise Control, Traffic Sign Recognition, Lane Keep Assist and Automatic High Beam headlights.



VERDICT

There is no doubt hybrid technology is here to stay and will be used in some form or other for most cars as the industry has to meet more and more stringent emission issues.

Toyota/Lexus adopted it first, even pioneered it, and the GS 300h is a good example of how hybrid systems can be integrated into passenger cars easily, they are not intrusive to use or that costly to buy and definitely provide lower running costs and reduce emissions.

For: Petrol/electric hybrid power driving refinement, good real-life fuel economy, low CO2 emissions mean low VED road tax and company car tax costs, comfortable ride, high specification, beautifully built, good kerb appeal.

Against: Odd shaped boot interior, sat-nav niggles re. phantom speed restrictions and queuing traffic warnings, not as agile in the handling department as a new BMW 5 Series but it has a better ride quality, only a three year warranty compared to parent company Toyota's five year warranty which includes their hybrid models.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Lexus GS 300h Executive Edition, 4-door sports saloon.

Price: £36,125.

Drivetrain: 2.5 litre, four cylinder normally aspirated 178 bhp petrol engine with a 141 bhp electric motor, six-step CVT continuously variable automatic transmission with four driving modes, rear wheel drive.



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Performance: 119 mph, 0-62 mph 9.0 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 64.2 mpg (47.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 104 g/km, VED road tax £130, BiK company car tax 19%.
Insurance Group: 26E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,880 mm (16.01 ft), W 1,840 mm (6.04 ft), H 1,455 mm (4.77 ft), boot space 450 litres (15.89 cu.ft), four doors/five seats.