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Lexus LC500 – First Impressions

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Visually stunning 2018 Lexus LC500 First UK Drive, courtesy of David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Kim comments, “David is one of the very first motoring writers to be able to test drive this desirable Lexus...”).

The UK debut of the Lexus brand’s new sporting flagship, the LC500 2+2 Grand Tourer two-door Coupé at the Goodwood Festival of Speed a few months ago whetted the appetites of well-heeled petrol-heads and the subsequent television advertising oiled the wheels of demand even further.

However the arrival of the LC500 in the UK has only just started to happen and demand to sample the newcomer is outstripping the availability of Media test cars. Even the DJ Chris Evans, a celebrity petrol-head who also writes the Mail on Sunday magazine’s motoring column used a recent offering to bemoan the fact that he was only allowed to sit in the new model and not drive it at his recent CarFest North and South events.

Well I did more than sit in it, I actually got to drive one version for a very brief time at the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Automotive Media test day last week.

The LC 2+2 Grand Tourer is available in two versions, the LC500 with a 5.0 litre V8 normally aspirated 471 hp petrol engine with a new 10-speed automatic gearbox and the LC500h, which has the new Multi-Stage hybrid petrol/electric powertrain with a 3.5 litre naturally-aspirated petrol V6 engine and two electric motors, giving a total output of 354 hp. It also has a new generation CVT auto transmission. Both are front engine rear wheel drive models.

The prices of the two powertrain options are identical. The LC500/500h costs £76,595, the Sport Package models cost £80,595 and the Sport+ Package versions £85,895. Standard features include the Lexus Safety System which incorporates lane keep assist, lane departure alert, automatic high beam lights and road sign assist, plus there are 20-inch alloys, leather upholstery, premium navigation and climate concierge. The optional Sports



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Package adds sports front seats, Alcantara upholstery, carbon fibre roof and 21-inch alloy wheels. The Sport+ Package adds an active rear spoiler, carbon fibre scuff plates, Alcantara roof lining and interior trim, Lexus Dynamic Handling system with rear wheel steering, variable ratio steering and a Torsen limited slip rear differential.

Eager UK buyers have already accounted for 150 sales out of a full year allocation of 250 units. So far 60% of UK buyers have opted for the V8 model most with the Sport+ Package. Order one now and delivery will be in around four months time.



The LC is the first production vehicle to use the new Lexus Global Architecture-Luxury (GA-L) platform which will also be used for the luxury LS saloon. The stunning exterior design is based on the award winning LF-LC concept car first revealed at the 2012 Detroit Motor Show, the US of course being the largest market for the premium Lexus brand.

The LC500 uses a new lightweight body of steel, aluminium and some carbon fibre elements creating a low centre of gravity and there are new multi-link front and rear suspension system for enhanced handling.



That's all under the skin but what has impressed all enthusiasts of motoring and early adopter customers is the stunning styling. At the front is a long and low bonnet with a new version of the Lexus spindle grill flanked by signature LED daytime running lights and LED headlights. The windscreen is sharply swept back to meet a low coupé roofline which flows to the rear steeply raked tailgate, large bumper, sculptured rear spoiler and huge twin trapezoidal exhaust ports. At the rear quarters are huge wheelarches giving the Coupé a muscular and low stance on the road. Sharp creased bodywork lines neatly link the powerfully styled front and rear ends of the Coupé. All these appealing design features are better described by studying the photographs; words in this case hardly do the LC500 justice.

Inside it's another design work-of-art with a multilayer dashboard design, but very much canted towards the driver in true sports fashion. A large rectangular 10.25-inch navigation screen is inset in the centre of the top layer of the dashboard and a second section of audio and other controls are grouped at the next level of the centre console below the large top screen. The lower centre console houses the gear selector, a centre controller plus the too sensitive touch panel used to select various functions - which is a common fitment, and has given rise to complaints about its sensitivity on other Lexus models. The drive mode selector allows for Comfort, Normal, Sport and Sport Plus selection. A muscular steering wheel houses a usual array of controls and switches, and paddle type ratio shifters are attached to the steering column.

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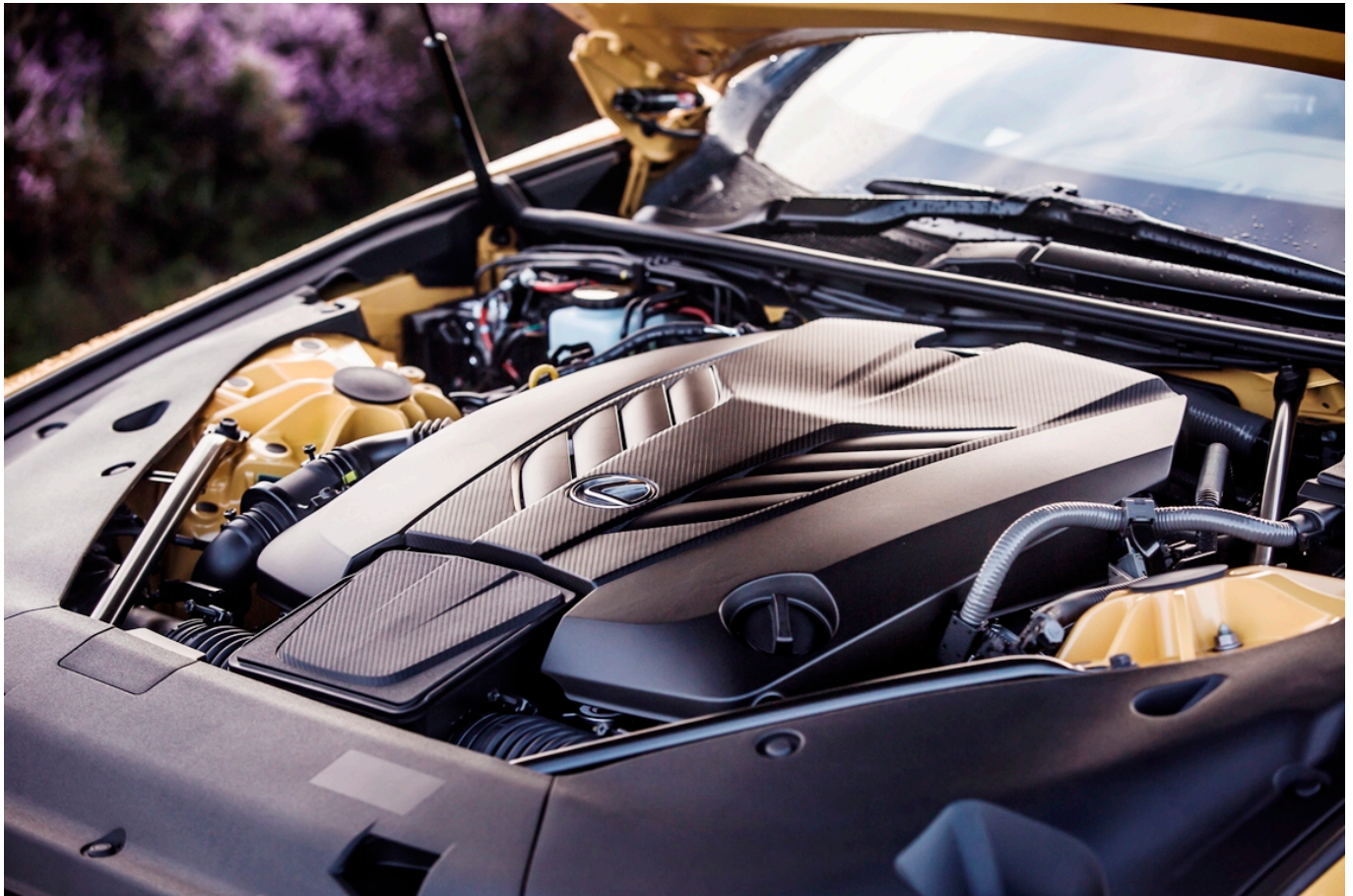
The overall quality of the interior is typical Lexus premium brand high quality, with the dash covered in hand-stitched leather with inlays of carbon fibre, metal or wood depending upon the specification chosen. The heated and ventilated electrically operated front sports seats offer comfortable support and suit a Grand Tourer but the rear seats are small with not really enough room for adult passengers travelling any distance. This space with the fold down rear seat backs will be best used for carrying extra luggage because the rear boot only offers 197 litres (6.96 cu.ft) of carrying space but that grows to a more accommodating



1,080 litres (38.14 cu.ft) with the seat backs down. The LC's overall length is 4,770 mm (15.65 ft), width 1,990 mm (6.53 ft) and height is 1,345 mm (4.41 ft). It's a big wide car on the road, especially away from motorways, but its high power to low weight ratio made it feel agile and with sharp handling. The sports GT ride comfort was not unduly compromised even in its highest performance mode. It's no track-day car, just a very stylish long-legged GT cruiser.

Competitors are not numerous in this exclusive GT sector but include the BMW 6 Series, Jaguar F-Type Coupé, Mercedes E/S-Class Coupés and, if you want to pay twice as much, the Aston Martin DB11 and Bentley Continental GT, and perhaps the LC500h is a cheaper alternative to the BMW i8 Coupé.

My very brief test drive last week saw me behind the only Media test cat Lexus has at the moment, the LC500 with the Sport+ Package priced at £85,895 and the most popular version ordered to date by eager first UK customers.



This model has the 5.0 litre, V8 naturally aspirated 16-valve DOHC petrol engine pushing out 471 bhp at 7,100 rpm, which is very close to its red-line limit. There is a sensible 540 Nm (398 lb.ft) of torque at 4,800 rpm, so for most road conditions that is ideal for outright acceleration response and muted enough for more leisurely driving on our winding country roads. With drive to the rear wheels the new 10-speed automatic gearbox is a delight, with super-smooth changes; you really don't feel them at all and it makes you wonder with that amount of torque whether 10-speeds are really needed. The system does automatically blip the throttle to match the engine revs on downshifting, which in turn creates a great exhaust note. Top speed is restricted to 168 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is just 4.4 seconds. The official Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 24.4 mpg and on my short test drive around the winding country roads of Hampshire the figure was even better at 24.8 mpg - and CO2 emissions are 267 g/km. But I really didn't get the chance to exert much pedal-to-the metal motoring due to the amount of slow moving traffic. Much of the time I



seemed to be working out what each of the many controls and functions this latest Lexus flagship offered those many eager customers seemingly queuing up to own an LC500. Hopefully a longer period with the desirable LC 500 Coupé will happen soon, maybe in the petrol/electric hybrid model when it arrives in the UK.

For the record as a comparison the equally priced LC500h petrol/electric hybrid has a top speed of 155 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 4.7 seconds, the Combined Cycle figure is 43.5 mpg, with lower CO2 emissions of 148 g/km.

VERDICT

Amazing.

For: Stunning exterior sports GT looks, desirability, scarcity value, high specification, fun to drive, effortless long-legged cruiser when required, impeccable build quality.

Against: Huge running/tax costs, tiny rear seat space.



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

Lexus LC500 Sport+ Package 2+2 GT Coupé. Price: £85,895.

Engine/transmission: 5.0 litre, V8, normally aspirated DOHC 16V petrol, 471 hp at 7,100 rpm, 540 Nm (398 lb.ft) of torque at 4,800 rpm, 10-speed automatic, rear wheel drive and rear wheel steering.



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Performance: 168mph (restricted), 0-62 mph 4.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 24.4 mpg (24.8 mpg on country roads short test drive).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 267 g/km, VED road tax £2,000 First Year rate then Standard rate £140 + annual £310 supplement for five years as the car costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 49E. Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,770 mm (15.65 ft), W 1,990 mm (6.53 ft), H 1,345 mm (4.41 ft), boot/load space 197 to 1,080 litres (6.96 to 38.14 cu.ft), two doors/four seats.