



L as in Luxury

Lexus LX 570 LUV shows that luxury can be very compatible with utility

We've heard some people refer to a larger SUV as a living room you can drive down the road (and for some that's a good thing). And we've all heard others lament whether a vehicle this large serves any defensible purpose at all. Still others can see the theoretical purpose, but doubt that many such vehicles get put into much actual off-road or otherwise taxing duty. The more luxuriously outfitted the SUV, the less likely it seems, to some, that it could possibly have been purchased for any "real" reasons or that it will ever get off-road. Or, if it does, that it'll make it back.

Enter the Lexus LX 570.

The specs are solid. This is the third generation of the large Lexus utility vehicle, replacing the LX 470 in their lineup. The new vehicle has a 5.7-liter V-8 boasting 383 horsepower, up over 100 hp from its predecessor, and 403 lb.-ft. of torque, up 22% from the prior. A DOHC 32-valve design with intelligent Dual Independent Variable Valve Timing optimizes power output for improved performance, "balanced" economy and reduced emissions. (This engine is shared with the Toyota Land Cruiser and Toyota Tundra full-size pickup.)

Towing capability has been massively upgraded, from 5000 pounds to 8500 pounds. The company promotes this as the first serious Lexus tow vehicle, suitable for such challenging loads as boats and horses. Easy access is one of the goals addressed

vehicle-wide. While everything else has been "upped," the tailgate has been lowered, providing friendly access for groceries, kids, pets and those other around-town tasks. Seats are promoted as being "semi-automatic folding," readily providing 1589 cubic feet of space in maximum cargo mode.

Visibility is enhanced by wide view front and side monitors, with cameras located in the lower grille, below the Lexus badge, and integrated into the passenger-side rear-view mirror. The navigation screen, inside, can thereby display the peripheral view in front of the vehicle, the full range of activity to the right side, or a split-screen showing both. Parking assist uses ultrasonic sensors in the front, rear and four corners of the vehicle, and provides audible beeps to warn the driver if things are getting too close for comfort.

Active headrests are an integral part of the LX 570's pre-collision system: in the event of impact from the rear, sudden body movement backward induces the headrest to move forward, quickly reducing the distance from head to headrest, thus reducing the risk of whiplash injuries. (This feature, unlike airbags, will not require reset maintenance in most situations.) Ten standard airbags are a best-in-class inclusion.

The LX 570 is available with a Mark Levinson Reference Surround 19-speaker, 5.1 surround sound 450-watt audio system.

The complete list of best-in-class and new first-in-class features is extensive indeed.

Suspension is engineered to accommodate both highway and off-road travel, and its adjustment is automatic, lowering the LX 570 at highway speeds. (There are also user-operated controls for optional heights located inside the vehicle.) The LX 570 features full-time four-wheel-drive and has a 6-speed automatic transmission with two overdrives. Multi-terrain ABS senses conditions and applies stopping power accordingly, a nice thing to know for a vehicle intended to be equally at home on the freeway, around town or hovering near the edge of a cliff.

We drove the LX 570 immediately after the IS-F, starting on the Lake Mead National Recreation Area's scenic Northshore Drive along Lake Mead. Amazingly, coming directly out of a performance sport sedan, we found the LX 570 to be extremely comfortable, capable and confidence-inducing on the open road. With plenty of hills and curves to tackle, the LX 570 ate them up.

The LX 570 is referred to by Lexus as a Luxury Utility Vehicle, or LUV. Okay. We've been exposed to many variants of the SUV moniker. And it's a Lexus, so the luxury aspect is a given. But what of the utility factor? Would we expect much, given that the defining aspect of a Lexus is its luxury?

Well, here the LX 570 is full of surprises. Granted, it spins off the sizable legacy of the Toyota Land Cruiser. That should give it plenty of off-road credibility. But has it been softened for the Lexus iteration and the luxury crowd? The course set up by our hosts would put it to a pretty strong test. We turned from Northshore Drive north into BLM land, in Nevada's stunning Redstone area. From the paved highway, we exited onto the Callville Wash Road and headed up some serious two-track to

Background and inset photos: Joe Sage

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the Callville Wash Road—some *extreme* two-track.

Most of this was already enough to impress us with the serious off-road nature of the LX. But the topmost point included a test of the vehicle's Crawl Control. As the name suggests, this feature offers engineered assistance to the slow and purposeful pace required in some of off-roading's most challenging spots, allowing the driver to pay that much more attention to such details as razor-sharp boulders and the edges of cliffs. It achieves this by modulating the throttle, along with braking force, working uphill or downhill, in forward or reverse, in any of three low-speed settings. There is a specific sequence to activate the system, and we recommend you give yourself an orientation and master the finer points before you get to the real thing. Our test route was the real thing, and then some. As the sun was going down, with tricks of light and shadow blurring the distinction between rough trail and sheer cliff, we considered taking one route that we're sure would have been certain death, as closer inspection revealed two tracks becoming one and then none. If they were tracks at all in the first place. But we can say this for the LX: it would have had no trouble getting to the edge of that cliff. This is one very capable off-road machine.

Make no mistake: Lexus is not abandoning the luxury market, just because this LUV is so capable. Their typical demographic target remains the affluent, the young and families (or all three in one customer). The LX 570's typical customer lives in a \$1.2 million house and has an average 2.9 vehicles per household. Of current LX owners, 30% have another Lexus, and that's usually an LS sedan. Nonetheless, with stats like those, Lexus finds their customers are not status- or indulgence-oriented. They buy for solid and practical reasons.

The LX 570 is going to be launched in two marketing phases: first, they will promote to Lexus loyalists, including those who need an LS stablemate; then they will target all-new customers, via a specific website, driverempowered.com. Both of these programs will be run in lifestyle media.

The Lexus assembly line includes ten Takumi stethoscope-equipped master craftsmen, ensuring all is running perfectly. Robots take 1300 photos of each vehicle on the line. Combine this solid quality with the serious attention paid to both on- and off-road capabilities, to general utility and to occupant comfort and luxury, and if this is the type of vehicle you need, well then—this may very well be *exactly* the vehicle you need. ■

Background: Joe Sage; inset photos: Lexus