

CONFIDENCE, COMFORT and a few QUIRKS



BY BARBARA & BILL CHAFFER

As the Lexus of SUVs, the LX 570 makes a big footprint in the upper echelon of off-road vehicles. Weighing in at three tons, this third-generation LX boasts a luxurious eight-passenger seating in one of the quietest cabins in the business, outstanding performance and some of the most impressive technology in the auto industry.



Like an athlete on steroids, the 2008 LX has a muscular platform riding atop an advanced suspension system with Active Height Control and Adaptive Variable Suspension, which produce a sedan-like ride on road. Off road, these systems combine the full-time four-wheel drive system with Torsen® limited-slip locking center differential to power the wheels with the best grip and keep the wheels on the ground. An innovative three-speed Crawl Control features works like a cruise control system for off-road to literally help the big SUV crawl up, down or through tough conditions—all the driver has to do is steer.

A new Wide-view Front & Side Monitor displays what's ahead and to the side, on the navigation screen, from cameras mounted in the grille and under the passenger side-view mirror. The driver simply pushes a button on the dash to activate the system, which functions at speeds up to about 7.5 mph. It's perfect for driving through tight spots like parking lots or checking the space between trees or rocks in the woods.

At 383 hp, the new 5.7-liter V-8 engine is 42 percent more powerful than the previous 4.7-liter V-8. The engine is equipped with the advanced Dual VVT-I system that controls valve timing and overlap on intake and exhaust valves to optimize fuel efficiency and emissions. Power reaches the wheels through a new six-speed sequential-shift automatic transmission. The LX accelerates from 0 to 60 mph in 7.4 seconds and has a top speed limited to 137 mph. The penalty for size and performance is a 12/18-mpg fuel economy rating from the EPA.

Owners who tow will appreciate the 8,500-pound capacity (up 2,000 pounds from the previous generation) and the standard engine oil cooler.

Inside, passengers are treated to a four-

zone climate control system with 28 air vents. The system says it is capable of maintaining a 64-degree Fahrenheit temperature at each register after 30 minutes of idling during a typical Arizona deserts summer (see sidebar). Entertainment options include a Mark Levinson Reference 5.1 surround sound system with 19 speakers and hard disc drive to store up to 2,000 digital songs. Rear seat passengers can enjoy to an available DVD movie theater with a nine-inch screen.

Safety is ensured by a 10-airbag system, which includes Roll-Sensing Curtain Airbags and driver and front-passenger knee bags. The driver's job is simplified with systems like Intuitive Park Assist, a first-in-class Pre-Collision System with Adaptive Radar Cruise Control and navigation system with XM NavTraffic® and backup camera.

Other standard or available features include split rear gate with power upper glass section, a power-retractable third-row seat, HomeLink® garage door opener and remote engine starting.

The only trim level has a base price of \$75,705 plus \$825 destination charge. Load the LX 570 with available features and the price starts to climb. Our test Lexus had a Luxury Package (with so many inclusions you are sure to want the bundle) for \$4050, the Mark Levinson audio system for \$3030, Lexus Link, the wide-view monitor system and rear seat entertainment package for \$900, \$1000 and \$1990, respectively, totaling \$88,660. Pricing for the 2010 model year is expected in late September.

Technological features, comfort, performance and off-road capabilities for the LX 570 are all pluses, but we thought the styling lacked the bling to set it apart in a crowd, though that may be exactly what some upscale shoppers are looking for. ■

OUR LOG BOOK: ANDY ROONEY MOMENTS

We had the LX 570 in our test fleet for one week. Overall, it is a superb land yacht, so—since that's a given—we found ourselves making notes about the quirks. Here are lightly edited comments from the voice memo log.

THE QUIRKS: ELECTRONICS

- Big plus: electric steering wheel telescope and tilt is something everybody should have. Easy to find, easy to do, even while driving.
- The screen interface is tough. Controls for tuning the radio... you try to find stations, can scan by type or scroll by type, a little confusing at first. While trying to figure it out, the buttons disappear, and by the time you get the buttons back, you're on to another station and can only scan and seek in one direction. Might be more modes, but we have no owner's manual.
- On the buttons and screen overall, it's not as clever or intuitive as they probably think it is.
- We parked and wanted to get out and lock it, the radio didn't turn off, a chime was going, looked at stop/start to see if we didn't turn it off, no we turned it off, start button was yellow, got back in, closed the door, started it, stopped it, this time the radio was already off, no chime, got out and locked it. Don't know if there's some sequence you must perform, but it seems either ill-designed or not working right.
- Fifth day, still trying to figure why we can't get out of the car. Maybe you have to put it in park, then turn it off... if we turn it off and then put it in park, it won't let us out. Or so it seems.
- Sixth day, still can't figure out how to synchronize the driver and passenger sides of the HVAC. Backing up, the rear vision camera no longer works just once, no idea why.
- As with computer programs, just because you have 100 new ideas doesn't mean you want every one of them implemented in what could otherwise be a simple interface.
- Radio controls are way down low and audio button way up high by the display, with climate controls in between. You have to go back up to the top for the climate control *screen* button, and... well, in a way that makes sense, everything for the *screen* is here, but in another way it makes really little sense at all. Controls should be near their devices.

THE RESOLUTION: As with any overly-gadgeted vehicle, if it's your only car, you'll get used to much of it, find some of it annoying and disregard much of it. If it's not your only vehicle, you'll get used to less of it, find more of it annoying and disregard much of it.

THE QUIRKS: RIDE AND HANDLING

- At first, we thought it cornered well, from an aggressive start at a red light, tracked well and handled well on a corner, but then on a straight-away seemed floaty and uncertain, hunting around for a track. Later, on a slower corner, it was feeling just as floaty, so... perhaps it benefits from being aggressively driven.
- Turning circle: not bad! (Checked later: 38.7 ft curb-to-curb.) Pulling into a parking space and doing a turn to the left or the right takes you just three spaces away from where you started. U-turns on two-lane roads barely needed a touch of driveway to achieve.
- The roads in one test area are darn near pool-table-smooth, to most vehicles we drive, but this one hunts through uneven areas that you don't even notice in most vehicles. Tires?
- Really baffled by this suspension. It's finding

washboard in this smooth road that we never encountered in other vehicles. It feels like it's skittering over them quite harshly.

- There are sport and comfort modes. Set in sport mode, we back up and hit the brakes and it wallows and rocks. Set on Sport, we hit a bump like a seam in the road with the kind of firmness that makes us think we just lost our grip for a second.

THE RESOLUTION: The center setting might be the answer on this comfort/sport thing. Comfort makes it feel to us like a big boat and sport seems over-controlled. So we try the middle setting. We drive through big speed bumps on a deserted commercial street in all three settings. Sport was *really* harsh, hitting the bumps like a brick. Comfort wallowed through it (the word wallow appears often in the memos). We figured floating was better than harshness, in this case. Then tried the middle. Not bad. We'd set it there and mostly leave it there.

THE QUIRKS: A/C

- There's a large interior volume to cool off in here, on a 110-degree day; after about 5 miles, it's still pretty warm. No real surprise, we guess, that it came to us with the a/c set on "low" (max). Put our hand over the vent, it's nice and cold, but the cabin is pretty warm. We reached behind and turned off the two a/c vents on the back of the console for the back seat passengers, much like hogging a fan at home, at the expense of everybody else.
- According to this, the outside temp is 82, when it's about 105. The reason we're in the climate interface is we're trying to get the two sides to run in sync. Driver and passenger temp are set separately and we're having to keep resetting both. Auto/off/front/rear/face... nothing about synchronizing. Tried pressing two at once and four at once and everything else, nothing worked. No manual.
- Day six: well, we found the coldest spot in the car... it's the glovebox in the console! The thing is like an icebox. It has its own little air vent that is probably as strong as what cools the cabin, but for one cubic foot or less.

THE RESOLUTION: Ride in the glovebox? Seriously, we have a hunch this can be improved, either with a service call or more fiddling (with a manual).

THE QUIRKS: SIZE

- The phenomenon of any full-size luxury SUV is pretty interesting. In a yield intersection, you have different vehicles, different sizes, and they basically all just kind of defer to you, and more surprisingly still, you just kind of take it. Feels pretty good in a way. We don't know if you can count on it.
- It just seems you can get away with a lot more driving in these big SUVs. and in fact people even encourage you to; they're very deferential. Wondering in the future if there are fewer of these, will it be more so? less so? will people have had their fill?
- Pulling out of a parking space, we guess it's nice to have mirrors as large as these, noticeably larger right from the get-go. Normally we'd be big fans of that, always useful on a big vehicle, however the combination of A-pillar handle grip and righthand mirror create one heck of a blind spot, enough that we almost pulled out in front of a Mustang coming through the parking lot almost completely hidden.
- The format is great for a 6'2", full-size American; we certainly like sitting in something this big, but it's a lot of mass if you don't truly need it.

THE RESOLUTION: If you like 'em big, no resolution needed. If you don't, no resolution possible. But one lasting thing we noted in our test log was that "we have some real serenity going on here." There are only a few vehicles in this class.