

New Lexus ES beautifully walks the fine line between luxury and performance

BY NICOLE WAKELIN

The all-new 2019 Lexus ES sedan gets a much-needed update this year with a new look, a choice of two powertrains, and the addition of an F SPORT trim. In a time when crossovers rule the road, it's a challenge to draw in sedan customers, but the ES is poised to do just that with this slate of improvements.

Let's start with the design and that polarizing Lexus spindle grille. You either love it or hate it, but you better get used to it because it's not going anywhere. It dominates the front of the ES, yet it works better than before thanks to subtle design changes elsewhere.

This ES is 2.6 inches longer, 0.2 inches lower, and 1.8 inches wider than its predecessor. Lexus also pushed the wheels further out to the corners of the car. These sound like minor changes, but it's what they do together that makes the design better. They give the ES a sportier stance with an aggressive demeanor that draws your attention.

Lexus backs up this sporty new look with a 3.5-liter V6 engine with 302 horsepower and 267 lb-ft of torque, paired to an all-new 8-speed automatic transmission. A luxury car like the ES walks a fine line when it comes to performance. The typical luxury customer wants a responsive engine, but doesn't want a rough, aggressive drive that makes driving a chore.

The ES walks that line beautifully, with strong throttle response and a quiet engine. It makes merging into highway traffic effortless and is remarkably quiet. The 8-speed transmission delivers power smoothly without attracting unwanted attention or causing a fuss.

New to the ES range is the F SPORT, which is already found on other models in the Lexus lineup. This is the sportiest trim of the lot, both in looks and performance. It gets its own special grille, dual-spoke 19-inch wheels, a trunk lid spoiler and dark exterior accents. As for performance, it's all about handling, with an adaptive vari-

able suspension system that offers 650 levels of adjustment.

Can you feel the difference between this and the standard suspension system? Yes. It's a subtle difference that's most noticeable when driving conditions are challenging. Think tight corners, winding country roads, and rough road surfaces. The suspension system in the F SPORT makes short work of these challenges and keeps the driver relaxed.

Although the best seat in the ES is the one behind the wheel, with its 10-way adjustability and optional heating and ventilation, we'd be remiss if we didn't praise the lounge-worthy rear seats. This is a luxury car, and it feels every bit the part when you sit back and simply enjoy the ride.

Your second powertrain choice is a fourth-generation hybrid engine that features a 2.5-liter 4-cylinder along with an electric motor for a combined 215 total system horsepower with 163 lb-ft of torque. Lexus engineers strove to get rid of

the rubber band feeling common to hybrid powertrains and their efforts paid off.

It creates an experience like driving a gas engine, but with the added bonus of excellent fuel economy. EPA estimates are forthcoming, but Lexus expects 44 mpg in the city, 45 mpg on the highway, and 44 mpg combined. That's a pleasant jump from the 22/33/26 of the gas engine.

The ES takes a leap forward in the technology department, becoming the first Lexus with Apple CarPlay. Unfortunately, Android Auto is not part of this brave new world, although the ES is Amazon-Alexa enabled. Smartphone integration is increasingly important in today's cars, and this is something of a halfway solution, one that is hopefully resolved in the future.

Audiophiles will appreciate the available Mark Levinson sound system. It's not simply a standard system added to any Lexus. Instead, it's designed specifically for this

vehicle to produce the best possible sound with 1,800 watts and 17 speakers. It sounds simply fantastic.

The ES also has a solid suite of safety features through Lexus Safety System+ 2.0, which is standard across the lineup. It includes a pre-collision system, high-speed dynamic radar cruise control with road sign assist, lane tracing assist, intelligent high beams, intelligent high beams, lane departure alert, parking support and Lexus Enform Safety Connect. Available options include blind spot monitor, park assist sonar, park assist sonar with pedestrian detection and panoramic view monitor.

If you're wondering what it'll cost you to get behind the wheel of the new Lexus ES, you'll have to wait a few months. Pricing won't be available until closer to the on-sale date later this year. With great styling, a comfortable interior, and luxury features, the 2019 Lexus ES is worth the wait. ■

The tail of the new ES (below upper left) includes a spoiler on both ES 350 F SPORT and ES 300h hybrid models. The Lexus spindle grille has multiple adaptations on the ES. At left, the ES 350 F SPORT has an aggressive jet black mesh grille of interlocking "L"s with dark trim, while the others (below top right) have an elegant vertical pattern and satin plated trim. Interiors vary accordingly; shown are (below left) the F SPORT's cockpit in Flare Red Hadori and (below center right) the ES 350 in Topaz Shimamoku Brown Ultra Luxury trim. Apple CarPlay (lower right) is a welcome addition to the new ES lineup; we hope Android Auto may lie in the future.



SPECIFICATIONS

ES 350	ENGINE3.5L DOHC 24v V6
	HP/TORQUE 302 hp / 267 lb-ft
	TRANSMISSION ..8-speed Direct Shift auto
	WHEELS17x7.5; optional 18x8, 19x8
	TIRES215/55R17; 235/45R18, 235/40R19
	DRAG COEFFICIENT(Cd)0.29 (0.26 F Sport)
	WEIGHT / DISTRIB (F/R)3649 lb / 61/39
	0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED6.6 sec / 131 mph
	FUEL / CAPACITYregular / 15.9 gal
	MPG350: 22/33/26 (city/hwy/comb)
350 F Sport: 22/31/25 (city/hwy/comb)
ES 300h	ENGINE2.5L DOHC 16v I-4
	GASOLINE HP/TORQUE 176 hp / 163 lb-ft
	ELECTRIC244.8V 29.1kW Ni-MH / 39 hp
	TOTAL HORSEPOWER 215 hp
	TRANSMISSIONelectronic-control CVT
	WHEELS17x7.5; optional 18x8
	TIRES215/55R17; opt 235/45R18
	DRAG COEFFICIENT(Cd)0.26
	WEIGHT / DISTRIB (F/R)3704 lb / 59/41
	0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED8.1 sec / 112 mph
	FUEL / CAPACITYregular / 13.2 gal
	MPG(mfg est): 44/45/44 (city/hwy/comb)
	DRIVETRAINFWD
	STEERINGrack mounted elec rack & pinion
	SUSPENSION : MacPherson strut-type indep;
	R: trailing arm multilink independent
	BRAKESF: 12.0 vented / R: 11.1 solid
	LENGTH / WHEELBASE195.9 in / 113.0 in
	TURNING CIRCLE 38.0 ft (38.8 w 18-19" wheels)
	HEADROOM (F/R)37.5 / 37.4 in
	LEGROOM (F/R)42.4 / 39.2 in
	CARGO VOLUME16.7 cu.ft
	BASE PRICE TBD

The 2019 Lexus ES 350 F SPORT Package (below) has the same powertrain as the ES 350, but includes all Premium trim features and adds Hadori aluminum interior trim, 19-inch split spoke wheels, F SPORT front seats, F SPORT pedals, active noise control, front and rear performance dampers, rear spoiler, an 8-inch TFT instrument panel display, F SPORT gauges with movable display ring, an F SPORT grille with dark surround, an F SPORT analog clock, and an F SPORT shift lever and knob.

