

Japanese precision pony car

BY JOE SAGE

Lexus RC is to Lexus IS as Lexus LC is to LS, to a large degree. C is for Coupe, S for sedan. The LC derives from the LFA supercar as much as from the LS sedan, though both aim for large luxury, as in L. The compact IS used to come also as an IS C coupe, and in a way it still does, but the name has changed—the Lexus RC is now the coupe version of the IS (RC stands for Radical Coupe, though that doesn't really explain the deviation).

The RC lineup is complex—and evolving. Gone is the 200t, as the 241-hp 2.0L twin-scroll turbo rear-driver is now an RC 300, though with AWD the RC 300 gets a 260-hp 3.5L V6. The RC 350 driven here gets the V6 also, but tuned to 311 hp. The rear-drive/AWD decision in a 300 means a different engine, but either RC 350 has the same uptuned V6, though the AWD 350 has a six-speed automatic, while the rear-drive RC 350 has a Sports Program Direct Shift eight-speed transmission.

And that's the car we have here—RC 350, rear-drive, Direct Shift eight-speed. But wait,

there's more. Ours is also an F Sport.

While there is a 467-hp 5.0L V8 RC F, a high-spec performance model unto itself, F Sport is a feature package for the regular RC 350. We might think “then it's not a real F,” but F Sport offers a lot. It costs about \$17 grand less than an RC F, equating to the RC F costing 36 percent more for 50 percent more horsepower and 24 percent faster acceleration, while the F Sport gets a few points better fuel mileage, is about five percent lighter and has a hair more rear weight distribution. Speed and cost are the main differentials for F versus F Sport.

RC F's 5.0L V8 evokes a Mustang GT, while the RC 350 F Sport's 311 hp is almost identical to a 4-cylinder EcoBoost Mustang, though the V6 RC 350 weighs some 200 pounds more.

In the eternal muscle car vs pony car debate, the four-door GS F (also featured in this issue) seems a muscle car, while the RC F and RC 350 F Sport coupes both have solid pony car souls. In fact, despite the RC's roots as a small car, it's about exactly the same size as the current Mustang, and Camaro is pretty close, as both have downsized. The Lexus RC, however, can handle a U-turn in two or three fewer feet—its remarkable 34.2-foot turning circle wowed us every time.

The RC is all Lexus from its premium interi-

or to its LFA styling to its remote touchpad controller. The touchpad remains finicky, though improved, while on the plus side, it allows for a smaller screen atop the dash, with a much cleaner center stack and the glorious inclusion of knobs for audio, far less distracting than screen use while driving.

Binnacle instruments are contextual and adaptable, with digital speedo and tach shifting to the right, bezel and all, when you call up submenus. (This sits behind a clear plate, concave to avoid direct reflection, but that shape magnifies a reflection of the steering column, interfering with visibility in direct or even indirect sunlight. This should be an easy fix, but as it is now, if we owned it we'd likely be at the craft store buying some matte black felt.)

While the Lexus spindle grille has its fans and its detractors, this iteration has brought out the very best in it—with curvature from hood line to ground level that integrates its shape neatly into an overall sculptured and featured front end that qualifies as rolling art.

We had a ball driving this for a week and could have kept it long term, as long as we could live without using the touchpad much. Can you put an LFA supersuit on an IS sedan, and does it deserve to wear it? Yes, indeed. At just over \$40 grand, the RC wears it well. ■

Our Lexus RC 350 F Sport's deep Flare Yellow premium paint was \$595 well spent, and its bolstered, heated/cooled, perforated leather F Sport interior was a knockout.



SPECIFICATIONS

SEATING CAPACITY.....four
 ENGINE3.5L alum block-heads DOHC 24v VVT V6
 HP/TORQUE311 hp / 280 lb-ft
 TRANS ..AA81E sport direct-shift 8-spd auto/paddles
 DRIVETRAIN.....RWD
 0-60 / 1/4-MI / TOP SPD.....5.8 sec / 14.3 sec / 143 mph
 SUSPENSIONF: dbl wishbone w coils, gas shocks, stblzr bar; R: multi-link/coils, gas shocks, stblzr bar
 STEERING rack & pinion elec pwr / VGRS for F Sport
 BRAKESF: 13.15" vented / R: 12.2 vented
 WHEELSF: 19x8 / R: 19.9 alum alloy
 TIRESF: 235/40R19 / R: 265/35R19 summer tires
 LENGTH / WHEELBASE184.8 / 107.5 in
 GROUND CLEARANCE5.3 in
 TURNING CIRCLE.....34.2 ft
 LEGROOM (F/R).....45.4 / 27.3 in
 CARGO CAPACITY...10.4 cu.ft (+fold-down rear seats)
 WEIGHT / DISTRIB3748 lb / 54/46
 FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY.....premium / 17.4 gal
 FUEL ECONOMY20/28/23 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE.....\$43,570

F SPORT PACKAGE.....\$4105

F Sport front bumper and grille, 19-inch 10-spoke F Sport wheels and staggered summer tires, heated-vented F Sport seats w driver memory, perforated leather steering wheel and shift knob, aluminum pedals, power steering column, silver perf trim, adaptive variable suspension, Sport-Sport+ and Custom modes, blind spot monitor, rear cross traffic alert, TFT instrument cluster.

NAV & AUDIO PACKAGE: Nav w color multimedia display, remote touch, Lexus Enform destination assist (w trial), Lexus Enform app suite, Mark Levinson 17-sprk 835w premium surround sound audio2725

LED FOGLAMPS.....410

PREMIUM TRIPLE BEAM LED HEADLIGHTS.....1160

VARIABLE GEAR RATIO STEERING1900

TORSEN LIMITED-SLIP DIFFERENTIAL390

FLARE YELLOW PREMIUM PAINT.....595

OPTIONS: orange brake calipers (300); power moonroof (1100); rear spoiler (399); cargo mat, trunk mat, key glove, wheel locks, rear bumper appliqué (319).

DESTINATION CHARGE.....995

TOTAL.....\$57,988



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