

Elegant performance battle tank

By Joe Sage

It surprised us to realize what a recent arrival the LC 500 is to the Lexus lineup. It feels as though we've driven many versions of it for many years. The fact is, however, that the Lexus LC was introduced just four years ago, in spring 2017 as a 2018 model. Thus it is not as surprising as it felt to us at first, to realize there has not been a convertible till now—introduced a year and a half ago as a 2021 model, the car we are driving here.

What already had felt like a deep, broad lineup had in fact been accomplished with just two cars, both coupes: a 471-hp 5.0L V8 Lexus LC 500, and a 354-hp LC 500h multistage hybrid with a 3.5L V6 and two electric motors for degrees of electric assist based on speed and other performance factors. Both are visually the same, both are four-seaters (with tight back seats) and both are heavyweights, the V8 coupe weighing in at 4280 lb and the hybrid with its batteries totaling 4435 lb.

The LC 500 V8 coupe has a 10-speed Sport Direct Shift automatic, while the more complex LC 500h hybrid has a multistage hybrid transmission

system comprising both a planetary-type CVT (continuously variable unit) and a four-speed automatic unique to that build.

These specs are vital when adding a convertible variant, as an open top always add weight—though small itself, a closed vehicle's roof exponentially adds strength and rigidity. Convertibles make up for this with added frame and body strength, adding weight. Thus, this convertible weighs in at 4540 lb, almost two and a half tons. (There is no hybrid convertible—at least not yet.)

All its horses and its well executed 10-speed transmission keep the convertible's weight transparent and its power on full display. The weight in fact probably provides a sense of strength and ability in ways a lightweight convertible may not.

To combine the best of its luxury interior and the great outdoors, the convertible modifies the glorious curves of the LC 500 coupe from the beltline up, but adds an irresistible trick on a beautiful day.

The top is soft, but the mechanism is as crafty, clever and complex as any retractable hardtop. And despite its complexity, it's quick. You can pause the operation, say to adjust your luggage. The windows are one-touch down (but not up).

We timed raising and lowering the top, with or without windows included. Timing is tough with pandemic distancing, done by one person with a phone as stopwatch in one hand and the convertible top controls in the other. And times are rough, but we did measure more than once.

Lowering is quick—about 15 seconds, our performance benchmark for even a simple top, highly impressive for a system with such complexity. Time to raise it is closer to 17 seconds. Either can be done at speeds up to 31 mph (50 km/h). The windows are so fast, we could barely time them, just over two seconds.

There are always notes and beefs with any vehicle, often with user interfaces, and this has a few (as always, centered around the touchpad-and-screen interface).

But when back home sitting there with the key in your pocket, only one emotion remains: you're ready to get back out there and give it another run.

Most of what can be said, this glorious cruiser says for itself. The Lexus LC 500 is always a head-turner to the world as it passes by, while delivering its owner a free spirited executive daily driver or grand touring experience second to none. ■

In line with the power, strength and speed of the LC 500 Convertible itself is its highly technical retractable top—an affair that, despite its complexity, matches or beats most of the simplest ones, at about 15 seconds to lower (at up to 31 mph).

SPECIFICATIONS

FACTORY	.....Aichi, Japan
BUILD	.....unitized steel body w steel front & rear subframes
SEATING CAPACITY	.....four
ENGINE	.....5.0L alum block/heads V8 32v DOHC dual VVT-i
HP/TORQUE	.....471 hp / 398 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....12.3:1
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD, Torsen rear diff
TRANSMISSION	.....10-spd sport direct shift automatic w paddles / manual mode
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	.....4.6 sec / 168 mph
SUSPENSION	.....F: double-joint multi-link; R: multi-link
STEERING	.....EPS speed-sensing coaxial rack & pinion, power assist
BRAKES	.....F: 15.7" vented w 6-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction brake pads; R: 14.1" vented w 4-piston opposed alum calipers, high-friction brake pads
WHEELS	.....(opt) 21" forged alloy (20 std)
TIRES	.....F/R: 245/40RF21 / 275/35RF21
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....187.4 / 113.0 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.4 ft (w available active rear steering) 34.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....36.72 / 32.07 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.57 / 28.04 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....3.4 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....4540 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....91 oct min / 21.7 gal
MPG	.....15/25/18 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$101,000
21" ALLOY WHEELS WITH polished finish, gloss black accents	.....2650
HEADS-UP DISPLAY	.....900
TORSEN LIMITED SLIP DIFF & YAMAHA PERFORMANCE DAMPER	.....460
INFRARED PREMIUM PAINT	.....595
PAINT PROTECTION BY 3M	.....430
CARBON SCUFF PLATES	.....600
DOOR EDGE FILM BY 3M	.....90
TOURING PKG: semi-aniline leather trimmed front seats, climate concierge w upper body heating, heated steering wheel, windshield de-icer, embossed headrest, Mark Levinson 13-sprk Reference Series surround sound audio system	.....5290
ADDTL: trunk mat, cargo net, wheel locks, key gloves	.....280
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1025
TOTAL	.....\$113,320

