

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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Lexus RX 500h
F SPORT Performance AWD

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



RX: prescription for change BY JOE SAGE

Lexus stakes a claim for the RX as having created the luxury crossover segment. That's more than fair, having been with us since 1998, when the crossover term was just first starting to get legs. An instant hit, it sold about 42,000 units in North America in its first year and has continued apace from there.

Generation five has arrived for 2023, with a new platform, suspension, powertrains and styling—simultaneously instantly recognizable and recognizably updated.

Notable right up front and center is its new grille and nose, an update to the long-running spindle grille, now a dramatic sharknose they call the spindle body—just as distinctive, truncating the angular hourglass of the old grille, while bearing a clever echo of that shape

with a light grille-like pattern stamped into its bodywork—to our eye all bolder, cleaner and stronger. This has developed over the past couple of years through concept vehicles, then production EVs, and its adoption seems destined to become equally universal.

Another welcome revision is to the infotainment interface. The gateway to functions for years was first a jumpy joystick, then a finicky trackpad, then with some functions migrating to the screen. The evolution took awhile, but now it's all-screen, a huge improvement.

We drove the new Lexus RZ 450e AWD EV in our prior issue, a very positive experience. The new RX is a very close cousin, sharing the RZ's electric-ready platform, lightweight and rigid with a low center of gravity, which

lengthens the RX wheelbase, contributing to exceptional ride and handling. That wheelbase is in fact one of the only specifications that is exactly the same between RZ and RX, although most overall are very close.

Our top trim F SPORT Performance AWD, a plug-in hybrid to boot, starts with a 271-hp 2.4L turbo-four and six-speed automatic, then adds an 80-kW electric rear eAxe, for a combined 366 hp and 406 lb-ft, delivered to the pavement through DIRECT4 all-wheel drive. The setup also tows about 3,500 pounds (with brake, not on ours, or about 1,000 without).

Our sessions start with an intense setup of features and interfaces, things an owner can fine-tune over time, but for us an all-at-once trial by fire, thus usually containing plenty of

annoyances. The RX was notably user friendly, however, all the moreso without that former joystick or trackpad barrier. Options are prioritized wisely, with uncommon consideration to the fact that many features need to be set just once when new, making repeat-access functions far easier to revisit regularly.

Other delights include the inside door handles, which consider something pretty much everybody else seems to have missed for all these years—when you're exiting, you push the door open, but almost universally have to pull a handle in order to push the door. Here, it's a new touch setup with a push action for a push result. It's surprising, maybe even awkward the first time, but from there it makes so much ergonomic and engineering sense, a smile is guaranteed every time. We highly appreciate the cleverness of its philosophy.

From power—including its layer of electrification—to handling to suspension, everything about the RX is far above average. Our

logbook noted it as being “near flawless; you pretty much never get tired of driving this; it's a total keeper.” We never even tried its drive modes—they had never crossed our mind because nothing is lacking in its default setup, another rare philosophical plus in our book.

Nothing is without a couple of nits noted, especially as that's part of our basic mission, but we largely dismissed them, also thinking of a concept we've surprisingly never used—if we scored these on 100-point scale like a high school test, this would get all As, with something generating a nitpick maybe getting a 95 instead of 100, but still an A, because everything is just done so well.

Sometimes incremental changes are the most powerful ones. All was well conceived and received in prior generations of Lexus RX. And as advanced as Toyota-Lexus electrified powertrains have long been, the introduction of this PHEV proves the incremental approach, once again, to be wise and highly effective. ■

With an economy founded in “the Five Cs”—copper, cotton, citrus, cattle and climate—Arizona is originally the Copper State, honored by our state capital topped off by a copper dome. Though the Grand Canyon State nickname was adopted as tourism boosters decided that too many people seemed to think the Canyon was in Utah, the Copperstate 1000 Road Rally and many businesses stay true to the Copper State name. Vehicles in copper paint are few and far between, and somehow even when one is offered, we're disappointed that that's not the sample we receive. This time around, we scored, with our RX 500h arriving in Copper Crest.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....	Cambridge, Ontario, Canada
ENGINE	.....	2.5L turbo-4 16v DOHC, chain drive w Dual VVT-i, D-4ST injection
HP/TORQUE	.....	271 hp / 339 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....	11.0:1
MOTOR	.....	F/R: perm magnet synchronous
BATTERY	.....	288V 240-cell NiMH
TOTAL SYSTEM HP/TORQUE	.....	366 hp / 406 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....	6-spd sequential-shift electronic w intelligence Direct Auto
DRIVETRAIN	.....	DIRECT4 AWD
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	.....	5.9 sec / 130 mph
SUSPENSION	.....	F: F-SPORT-tuned, indep MacPherson struts w coils, solenoid-actuated shocks, stblzr bar, performance damper; R: multilink w coils, gas shocks, stblzr bar, performance damper
STEERING	.....	elec power rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....	F: 15.74x1.10 vented, F SPORT 6-piston opposed calipers; R: 13.39x0.71 vented; floating-type single piston
WHEELS	.....	21-in 10-spoke matte black alloys
TIRES	.....	235/50 R21 SL a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....	192.52 / 112.2
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....	8.07 in
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	.....	15 / 25°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....	curb-to-curb 35.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....	(pano rf) 37.6 / 37.03 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....	41.06 / 37.36 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....	29.59 / 46.19 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....	4684-4750 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....	999 / (or w brake) 3494 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....	premium unl / 17.7 gal
MPG	.....	27/28/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....	\$69,630
SPECIAL COLOR: Copper Crest	.....	595
LEXUS INTERFACE: 14-in touchscreen, Drive Connect w cloud nav, intelligent assistant, destination assist 3-yr trial	.....	1105
DIGITAL REARVIEW MIRROR	.....	200
PANORAMIC VIEW MONITOR	.....	800
COLD AREA PKG	.....	100
HEATED/VENTED FRONT SEATS	.....	680
POWER REAR SEATS	.....	550
PANORAMA GLASS MOONROOF	.....	500
TRIPLE-BEAM LED HEADLAMPS	.....	1565
POWER REAR DOOR W KICK SENSOR	.....	150
DIGITAL KEY: (4G: requires subscription)	.....	275
TRAFFIC JAM ASSIST: (4G: requires Drive Connect subscrip)	.....	620
ADVANCED PARK	.....	250
120V AC INVERTER	.....	550
REAR BUMPER APPLIQUE	.....	90
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....	1150

TOTAL **\$70,780**

2023 LEXUS RX LINEUP

Check latest prices. See our sticker price above.

	FWD	AWD
RX 350	\$48,550	\$50,150
Premium	50,550	52,150
Premium+	53,150	54,750
F SPORT Handling	---	57,750
Luxury	56,500	58,150
RX 350h	---	50,150
Premium	---	52,150
Premium+	---	54,750
Luxury	---	58,150
RX 500 F SPORT Performance	▼	62,750

