

Lexus LS600h Long Wheel- base Hybrid

Road Test by Ian Lammings

AS standards rise in the automotive world it becomes harder and harder to be astounded and impressed.

One marque that has always been at the head of the techno-battle of the giants is Lexus and the new LS600h is no exception.

Just when BMW, Audi and Mercedes think they have caught up, Lexus launches a car to keep it ahead of the field.

This is why: it's the mother of all hybrids. Start with an already impressive 5.0 V8 that is eerily quiet, astonishingly fast and supremely smooth; then add a 220+hp electric motor, giving the LS600h an awesome amount of power – 455hp in total in fact.

So what you are looking at is a limo with the power of a 6.0 litre V12 (hence the 600 moniker) but the fuel consumption and emissions of a car a third of the size.

Combined fuel figures are an incredible 30.4mpg where your average V12 would struggle to see 15. As for the environment, the LS boasts a tax-busting CO2 figures of just 219g/km – incredible.

And that sets the scene for a totally remarkable car, a vehicle with so much kit on it that it is hard to know where to start. All manner of under-skin wizardry makes the LS600h phenomenal to drive. It is fast, smooth, quiet, controlled, utterly accomplished in its levels of handling, braking and overall refinement. It is truly without peers.

Then there are the toys: LS600h will actually park itself. Just trigger the intelligent parking assist and the steering wheels twirls around on its own and the cars slots carefully into a gap that it has already scanned and assessed to be big enough. All you do is control the speed – it's uncanny.

Small cameras and sensors watch the world around you to make sure that nothing gets in your way. If it does then the car can tell when there is going to be an impact and prepares for the worst. It can even tell if you are not looking forward and the traffic has stopped ahead – and brake for itself! But while it is a superb drive you are going to be fighting to be in the back of this particular vehicle.

Never has there been so much legroom in the back of a car as the long wheel base version of the 600h. Sit on the left and the front passenger seat can be moved out of the way completely. A footstool then rises out of the heated rear seat, which reclines, of course.

There is vibro-massage for neck, shoulders and back and even Shiatsu for the worst tension knots. Raise the blinds on the side and back windows, activate the head-cloth mounted DVD player and sit back and enjoy the surround-sound show. If you don't want to annoy the driver then slip on the high-fidelity earphones and keep the noise to yourself.

The LS600h really is the ultimate in luxury and advanced technology with every gadget going. But the really clever thing is that the engineers have left enough soul in the big Lexus for it to remain a joy to drive.



Vital Statistics

Model: Lexus LS600h LWB Hybrid

Engine: 5.0 litre V8 petrol with magnetic electric motor

Drivetrain: eight speed automatic, all wheel drive

Power: 455hp total

Top speed: 155mph

0-62mph: 6.3secs

Insurance group: 20

Miles per gallon combined: 30.4

CO2 (g/km): 219

Price: from £83,645.00