

Top of the Class

Ian Lamming is wooed and won over by the traits of the sumptuous Lexus RX450h

YOU can learn so much standing in a car dealership about the vehicles they are trying to sell.

Some are mere supermarkets banging out the tin cans, at the lowest price possible, in the quickest possible time. These have their place and for those who need rather than desire a car that's just fine, if a little brutal, clinical.

By contrast, a couple stands within the opulent, relaxed and friendly surroundings of the Lexus dealership. They have had their fingers burnt buying an iconic, marketing masterpiece that resides at the very top of the SUV price range but has disappointed abjectly.

They look to Lexus for rescue and restoration and, trust me, they will not be disappointed by the RX450h they have ordered. You see, where the previous top of the 'range' has disappointed, the RX will only delight.

The problem with marketing hype is that the driving experience can often be underwhelming.

Some of the larger SUVs are just so big that they

intimidate and they are so expensive that they become a worry to drive.

RX doesn't have this problem. It has three strong points that pitch it to the top of the class. Firstly, no off-roader looks as stunning (with perhaps the exception of the slightly smaller sibling the NX).

From the rendered spindle grille of the 450h F Sport, to its angular lights and lines, the the floating roof and the tidy rump, RX is simply glorious in its aesthetics and like no other (save the NX etc etc).

Secondly, the quality is off the scale thanks to the obsession of Takumi craftsmen, who do indeed wear white gloves and coats and work in dust-free rooms as they hand stitch leather, fashion the finest Yamaha timber and wet and dry lustrous paintwork.

The result is a car that feels stunningly special, particularly as this traditional approach is mated to the latest technology.

Lastly, RX is large and opulent like the couple's previous but unfortunate mismatch. The difference lies in the dynamism of the drive. This particular SUV is far from cumbersome. It seems to shrink to normal

proportions once behind the wheel. It is lithe and nimble, strong and sprightly, fun and friendly to drive. No intimidation here just pure driving pleasure.

The RX450h uses a lusty 3.5 litre V6 with two powerful electric motors for a unique driving experience. That's 313HP of creamy oomph but with a glorious V6 rasp. In towns and car parks the electric motors rule allowing this beast to float along in stealth mode.

F Sport looks the part with extra styling cues and also gets increased agility thanks to various driving modes including Sport+ for maximum performance and feel. It's fabulous and by some sort of automotive miracle makes a big car handle like a sports saloon – what a combination!

Both the car and dealership leave you reluctant to leave and definitely wanting more.

The best thing to do, really, is to place your order so the next time you have to head home it will be so much easier behind the wheel of your own RX. Happy driving nice couple, I'm sure it will be.

Fact File

- Lexus RX450h F Sport
- Engine: 3.5 litre V6 petrol plus twin electric motors
- Power: 313hp combined
- 0-62mph: 7.7 secs
- Top speed: 124mph
- Transmission: CVT
- Combined MPG: 51.4
- CO2 g/km: 127

