

Road Beat: 2016 Lexus IS200t, a Euro fighter



2016 Lexus IS200t is worth the money. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

IS has been in the United States since 1999 as a 2000 model. It was designed to be the least expensive Lexus and to be the sportiest Lexus with rear wheel drive and a short 105-inch wheelbase and a length shorter than most compacts at 173 inches.

Lexus gave IS a 3.0L inline six that made 215-220 hp. It didn't become my favorite Lexus because it lacked a bit of power and that honor fell to the wonderful GS400. That was a car I recommended to a lot of friends who thanked me for a wonderful driving experience.

But in 2006 as the GS was getting fatter and a bit bloated,

the IS became the car it should have been with a new redesigned generation and a 306 hp 3.5L V-6 and with the suspension creds to match. It instantly became my favorite Lexus with outstanding world class performance, great looks and superb handling. Lexus lengthened the wheelbase to 107.5 inches and its length grew by seven inches, but still many journalists complained it was still too small. However, me, being of average height and weight thought it was the perfect size.

In 2013 IS while retaining its overall crisp, aggressive shape brought us its third generation, with wheelbase and length growing by about three inches (110 and 183 inches respectively) with the wheelbase actually exceeding that of the Camry based Lexus ES (by an inch) while remaining seven inches shorter. The only objection to IS's chiseled wedge shape is the signature L'finesse grille which looks like a frown.



Specifications

Price \$37,325 to about \$45,000

Engines

2.0L turbocharged, DOHC, 16 valve, inline four 241hp @ 5,800 rpm

258 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,650-4,400 rpm

3.5L, 24 valve, DOHC V-6 255

hp @ 6,400 rpm (IS300)
236 lb.-ft. of torque @
2,000-4,800 rpm
3.5L, 24 valve, DOHC V-6 306
hp @ 6,400 rpm (IS350)
277 lbs.-ft. of torque @
4,800 rpm
Redline 6,600 rpm

Transmission

Eight speed automatic with
paddle shifters (IS200t-AWD
IS300 and 350 models receive
a six-speed auto)

Configuration

Longitudinal front
engine/rear wheel drive/all-
wheel drive (IS300/350 AWD)

Dimensions

Wheelbase 110.2 inches
Length 183.7 inches
Width 70.9 inches
Height 56.3 inches
Track (f/r) 60.4/61.0 inches
Weight 3,583 pounds
(IS200t)
Weight distribution 54/46
percent
Trunk capacity 13.8 cubic
feet
Fuel capacity 17.4 gallons
Steering lock to lock 2.84
turns
Turning circle 34.2 feet
Wheels (opt) 18X8/18X8.5
inch alloys
Tires (f/r opt)
225/40X18/255/35X18

Brake diameter (f/r)
13.15/12.2 inches
Coefficient of drag 0.28

Performance

0-60 mph 6.50 seconds
50-70 mph 3.45 seconds
50-70 uphill 4.96 seconds
Top speed Artificially
limited at 131 mph and I
believe them.
Fuel economy EPA rated
22/33/26 mpg
city/highway/combined
(IS200t). Expect 28 mpg in
rural country driving and
36-37 mpg on the highway.

Powering this Lexus is a 2.0L twin-scroll turbo charged inline four-cylinder engine that is hooked up to an eight-speed automatic driving the rear wheels. AWD is available with the IS300 and the IS 350 which both use the Lexus 3.5L V-6. However, the IS300 gets a detuned version with only 255 hp while the IS350 is rated at 306 hp (both at 6,400 rpm) at full tilt boogie. The turbo four is rated at 241 hp at 5,800 rpm and 258 pounds of twist at 1,650-4,400 rpm which means at just 1,650 rpm this engine is already knocking down about 60 hp. A normally aspirated engine of 2.0L would require about double the rpm to achieve an output of 60 hp.

One other interesting note is that there are at least three turbocharged 2.0L in production and 240 hp seems to be the standard with the IS besting the other two engines (BMW and Hyundai-Kia) by one hp. Torque production is also almost identical at about 260 pounds. Audi, Mercedes and Cadillac make 12 to 35 more hp out of their 2.0L turbo engines, more than likely from higher boost pressures. I wouldn't worry about the minor spec differences.

Performance for this nearly 3,600-pound car is about where you would expect with a 0-60 mph elapsed time of 6.50 seconds. Passing performance is a bit better with a 50-70 mph pass lasting 3.45 seconds and the same run up a steep (6 percent grade) lasting an average of 4.94 seconds. The factory 0-60 mph time is listed at 6.90 seconds. The driver must have left the emergency brake on.

There is some turbo lag apparent especially off the line, but in everyday driving it is not very apparent. However, as with most turbo charged cars, the throttle is not linear. In other words, when you ask for power from the engine room, sometimes you get more than you asked for and have to back off a bit a second or so later. It's something that you get used to, just like flying a jet powered or turboprop airplane. You add throttle and nothing happens for a second or two, then all of a sudden you get this rush of power. One other thing exacerbating this non-linear throttle is the tendency for the tranny to hunt by quickly dropping a gear or two under the slightest throttle pressure. But the tranny operates smoothly, like warm butter and the shifts a lightning quick.

Fuel economy is a bit better than the EPA ratings which are 22/33/26 mpg city/highway/combined. On the highway with the cruise control set at 70 mph the IS recorded 36.9 mpg in a two-way run. On a round trip from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe the average was 30.3 mpg with several full throttle passes. Overall including that trip plus several full throttle performance runs, some stop and go in traffic and some rural country driving the IS averaged 28 mpg. Early Volkswagen Bugs were lucky to get 25 mpg.

Now to what the IS is all about, handling. While most cars today get MacPherson struts up front, the IS gets a more sophisticated double wishbone system with multilinks suspending the rear. Of course, gas filled shocks and coils are at all four corners with stab bars at each end.

Being equipped with the F Sport option (\$3,545), other creds include special staggered 18 inch wheels, 8 inches wide in front and 8.5 inch in the rear shod with summer tires 225/40 in front and wide 255/35 in the rear. In addition to the suspension is tweaks, it gets some cosmetic enhancements. Steering lock to lock is a quick 2.84 turns and it has a tight 34 foot turning circle. It adds up to predictable, powerful handling and grip. Understeer is mild, turn in extremely crisp and it feels more like a go kart with almost no body roll going directly where you point it. Is there a negative? Yes, one minor niggle in that when the steering wheel is at full lock, left or right, it doesn't want to unwind by itself.

Ride quality is understandably on the firm side, but still quite smooth with no harshness. I prefer this type of ride quality. It still is quite supple, compliant and well controlled. It is also quiet which is good as the sound of four cylinder engines do little to stir my soul except for high winding inline motorcycles. There is not much, if any, whine from the turbo, either. There is some noise however, from the high-performance summer tires. The engine spins a very low 1,900 rpm at 70 mph which is part of the reason for its exceptional highway fuel economy. IS also gets a large 17.4-gallon fuel tank.

Braking is spectacular with huge four wheel ventilated discs and all the acronyms. It has all the electronic interventions and no less than eight airbags. The optional (F Sport or premium package) LED headlights were fantastic on low and high beam, with the low beam being wide, long and flat with a remarkable cutoff so as not to blind oncoming traffic.

Inside are great body fitting seats with standard full power. A center tach encircles a digital speedo with a complete info center to the left. While the center stack still operates with a mouse, it is getting easier to use as it was not an issue for me. Materials of the interior were top quality except for the seats which were done in NuLuxe, Toyota's name for vinyl.

If you want leather, it requires the Luxury Package.

Rear seating has improved with the 3 inches of extra wheelbase and the trunk, while not huge (13.8 cubes), is well shaped.

Pricing for the IS200t starts at \$37,325 plus \$940 for the boat from Japan. My tester had the F Sport Package (\$3,545) and the Nav/Mark Levinson Sound system (\$2,645). Some other smaller items like Blind Spot monitor (\$600) and illuminated door sills (\$425) a cargo net (\$65) and a cargo mat (\$105) brought the sticker total to \$46,650.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.