

Road beat: Lexus NX300h – a new hybrid SUV



The Lexus NX300hAWD is available with an electric motor on the rear axle. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

For those of you hooked on hybrids, Lexus has a new relatively inexpensive SUV for your consideration. It's a new version of the well-received NX series, based on the super successful Toyota RAV4. First thing to notice is that the NX has absolutely no resemblance to the RAV4, inside and out.

While its design starts off badly with that huge ugly grille that resembles an upside down frown, the balance of the design has a trim, sleek sporty look with a profile that looks low and lean and no unnecessary lines to alter its shape. One interesting little item are small tabs on the black rear wheel

fender blisters. Why are they there?

As reported in my test of the NX200T model, wheelbase is identical to the RAV4 at 104.7 inches, indicating a chassis sharing. Even the steering rack has the same 2.68 turns lock to lock, but from there most other dimensions are close, but no cigar. It is a couple inches longer at 182 inches, an inch wider at 74 inches, it is shorter (and sleeker) by a couple of inches at 65 inches. The NX also has an inch wider track at 62 inches. NX300h also has gained some weight to 4,055 pounds (about 100 pounds) over the recently tested NX200T.



Specifications

Price \$34,480 to about \$45,000 plus \$925 for destination

Engine

2.5L DOHC 16 Valve inline four 154 hp @ 5,700 rpm
152 lb-ft of torque @ 4,400 rpm

Permanent magnet electric motor (2)

Nickel Metal hydride battery output 67 hp

Maximum combined output 194 hp

Transmission

CVT

Configuration

Transverse front engine/
FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 104.7 inches

Length 182.3 inches

Width 73.6 inches

Height 64.8 inches

Track (f/r) 62.2/62.2 inches

Ground Clearance 6.9 inches

Weight (fwd/awd) 4,055/4,180
pounds

GVWR (fwd/awd) 5,090/5,200
pounds

Tow capacity 1,500 pounds

Fuel Capacity 14.8 gallons

Cargo capacity (second row
up/down) 16.8/53.7 cubic
feet

Wheels (std/opt) 17X7/18X7.5
inches

Tires (std/opt) 225/65X17;
225/60X18

Steering lock to lock 2.68
turns

Turning circle 37.4 feet

Co-efficient of drag 0.34

Performance

0-60 mph 7.53 seconds

50-70 mph 4.36 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 6.46
seconds

Fuel economy EPA rated
35/31/33 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 35 mpg on the highway
at legal speeds and 31 mpg

in suburban driving.

Big differences are also under the hood as this new NX300h gets a hybrid powertrain which is probably quite similar to the Camry Hybrid using the same 2.5L 16valve, DOHC Atkinson cycle engine which makes 154 hp at 5,700 rpm and 152 pounds of twist at 4,400 rpm plus an electric motor which provides a boost of another 40 hp (battery output limits the electric boost number even though its rated at 141hp). Total combined output is 194 hp.

Instead of a six-speed torque converter tranny driving the front wheels, the Hybrid gets a CVT tranny, which makes it a bit smoother. AWD is available with an electric motor on the rear axle. Performance is very good and its numbers are interesting when compared to the turbos' 235 hp, 258 pounds of twist, 2.0L NX200T. Zero to 60 mph times are very close as the 300h averaged 7.53 seconds. The 200T only was 0.2seconds quicker at 7.33 seconds. Passing times are also close, but the separation is not as close as the 50-70 mph times for the 300h were 4.36 on a level pass and 6.46 seconds on an uphill pass. The 200T numbers were 3.96 and 5.46 seconds, respectively. The reason for the quicker times is at that point there is almost no turbo lag, while the hybrid computer still has a slight delay.

But there is a big difference in fuel economy. The 300H is EPA rated at 35/31/33 mpg city/highway/combined while the 200T comes in at 22/28/25, however the real difference is not 8 mpg combined or 13 mpg city. The 300h turned in 31 mpg overall and 35 mpg on the highway at 70 mph and during a 100-mile morning trip to Vallejo with some traffic and speeds of 75 mph the 300h returned 32 mpg. The 200T numbers were 26 mpg overall and 29-30 mpg at 70 mph on a level highway. The 300h should net you an improvement of 5 mpg overall versus the 200T. However, fuel tank capacity shrinks from 15.9 to 14.8 gallon, but overall range should grow by about 50 miles.

While the 300h shares the same suspension as the 200T, the former gets a slightly softer suspension. It's the same MacPherson struts up front with a double wishbone set up in the rear. The wheels were the same at 18X7.5 inch alloys but the 300h gets 225/60X18 rubber and the 200T gets shod with 235/55X18 rubber. Steering gear is the same. I noticed a difference in the slightly softer handling as my 200T had the F Sport handling package upgrade and there is a difference. But if you go with a 300h, there is no F Sport option. So handling is still good with quick steering, you will notice more body roll when pushed hard with more understeer. The 300h gives you almost equal performance, much better fuel economy, but don't expect to be doing Mario Andretti imitations at Laguna Seca.

With the less aggressive suspension settings comes a smoother, quieter ride. I described the 200T as being on the firmer side of the ride equation. The 300h is less firm, just a bit more compliant. It is of Lexus quality. With the Hybrid drive it is also quieter overall, Lexus quiet, especially at low speeds when running pure electric which it can do up to about 45 mph and a feather foot. No tach so no engine speed at 70 mph, but I estimate it to be around a very low 2,000 rpm.

Lexus is second to none when it comes to safety with four-wheel disc brakes (fronts ventilated for heat dissipation) with all the acronyms that have excellent performance stopping the 300h in 41 feet, identical to the 200T. At least eight airbags protect the passengers and pilots and an alphabet soup of letters provides automatic intervention to keep driver error or inattention from becoming too dangerous. But nothing will protect from bad judgment. This is not an autonomous driving vehicle. Headlights are excellent.

Now to another area where Lexus are second to none, the interior. The 300h is no exception, the leather is extremely soft, most everything is soft touch and the quality would be fit for cars costing double. The perforated leather seats are

beautiful and inviting and they sit better than they look. Instrumentation has a hybrid bent with the normal tach hole being occupied by a dial showing engine and electrical usage. The trip computer also functions on system energy usage among at least 20 other functions and vehicle info. In fact, the tire pressure monitoring system worked well to not only tell me of a low tire, but identified the offending tire and its current pressure. After refilling, it allowed me to keep track of the leak.

If there is one thing about the Lexus that is annoying, it is the mouse system that operates mostly the sound system. It's more difficult to operate than the Mazda system. Then again it might take some time of more than a week and there is always operator error.

Pricing for the Hybrid is about \$5K more than the 200T meaning the basic FWD 300h stickers for \$39,720 plus the boat ride from Miyawaka, Japan. Ever notice how most Japanese words have only two letters per syllable (except for "Japan")? My tester had over \$8K in options including a \$4,505 Luxury Package (18 inch alloys, heated and cooled leather seats, moon roof and more), and a \$1,875 Nav system. There was a \$400 power folding rear seat system. The total sticker was \$48,945. But the carpeted floor mats were free. AWD will add \$1,590.

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.

Paranormal investigation and campout in Genoa

Find out if Mormon Station in Genoa is haunted at the paranormal campout.

Visitors will camp overnight on the grounds of Mormon Station while participating in a paranormal investigating of Genoa's past citizens who might still be visiting the Old Mormon Station today. This experience includes a tour of the park, a light Dutch oven dinner, and a haunting paranormal investigation under the light of a full moon.

Participants will have the chance to experience the park and its history through the eyes of a practiced paranormal investigator.

Space is limited for the July 16-17 event. Call 775.782.2590 to register. The night starts at 7pm, with the event ending at 8am.

This program is intended for ages 15 and up. Minors must be accompanied by an adult.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- Local author Todd Borg returns to the South Lake Tahoe Library with his latest Owen McKenna Tahoe mystery "Tahoe Dark" on Aug. 3 at 6:30pm. Book sales and signing to follow the free talk. The library is at 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.

- Moonshine Bandits will be at Whiskey Dicks in South Lake on July 8 at 9pm. Tickets are \$18.

· A ranger from the Washoe Lake State Park will lead a talk about the Carson River ecosystem on July 31 at 7pm. She will discuss the Great Basin, Carson River watershed, local river communities and water quality. She will be highlighting the plants and wildlife that call the ecosystem home, as well as the four state parks located along the Carson River. Meet at the wagon shed at Mormon Station State Historic Park in Genoa.

· The South Lake Tahoe Library is having a book sale on Aug. 6 at 10am. Friends of the Library get in an hour early. Join that day. The library is at 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.

· Karen Wiese, author of "Sierra Wildflowers" and former botanist and restoration specialist, will lead a wildflower walk in Hope Valley on July 22 from 9am-2pm. Cost is \$60 for guests of Sorensen's, \$95 for others. It includes lunch. For more information or to reserve a spot, call 530.694.2203.

Longest serving LTCC board member to retire

By Lake Tahoe News

Change is coming to the Lake Tahoe Community College board of education no matter the outcome of the November election. Fritz Wenck is saying goodbye.

When Wenck's term expires in December he will leave with the distinction of being the longest serving board member. Not only that, he was also one of the original board members for the two-year college in South Lake Tahoe.



Fritz Wenck

He and Roberta Mason were first elected in 1974. She retired in December 2014.

With the college now having board members be elected by geographic district, it meant Wenck and Karen Borges were in the same district. The options were neither would run, they face-off against each other, or just one incumbent would be on the ballot. The latter will occur.

Wenck has seen plenty of changes during his 42-year tenure on the board. Classes were first taught in a hotel on Highway 50. Now the 164-acre campus off Al Tahoe Boulevard is undergoing a bit of a renaissance with the voter-approved bond infusing cash into the facility.

At the start there were 500 students, while today there are more than 5,000. Class offerings were limited, now there is a robust curriculum.

While there is plenty of work to be done in the next five months, one key vote he might have the opportunity to cast is who the next president of the college will be. This is because President Kindred Murillo tendered her resignation earlier this year, with the goal be being gone by early next year at the latest.

He is the current board president, a role he has had multiple times in the last four decades.

Wenck isn't likely to be bored when he no longer has to attend the monthly board meetings. After all, he is still a dentist.

Before opening his practice in South Lake Tahoe in 1970, he was a dentist for the Navy from 1966-70. He later spent 29 years in the Navy Reserves, retiring as a captain.

The Optimist Club has been a passion of his. He's also an active host for foreign exchange students, including members of the local hockey team.

Between Wenck and his wife, Patience, they have seven children and 10 grandkids.

Opinion: EDC budget needs dose of reality

By Larry Weitzman

A new El Dorado County budget was presented to the Board of Supervisors on June 13. While it was signed by Don Ashton, it is the budget of outgoing CAO Larry Combs, his final gift to the county. The bills for his one-year tenure are now coming due.

A simple analysis of the first few pages in the budget summary tells the tale and that tale is simply too many employees or overpaid employees. Understand that nearly 70 percent of all county expenditures are for salaries and benefits. Another huge expense is an annual expenditure of about \$10 million in contracting solely done by the CAO in contracts less than \$64,000.



Larry Weitzman

According to the 2015-16 budget summary on page "v" was a claimed reduction in full time equivalents of 28.35 to 1,833.89 FTEs. On top of that during the year the county eliminated 15-16 high paid FTEs is a buyout program that included \$50,000 golden handshakes or close to a \$1 million. The total spent on salaries and bennies will be \$158.2 million, which is an increase of more than \$13 million over the prior year. That is an unsustainable growth of 10 percent. Just four years ago and for a period four years prior, the salaries and benefits of EDC consistently averaged \$118 million.

But in the 2016-17 budget FTEs start the year at 1,891.49 FTEs. The budget readily admits a growth of 76 FTEs, which does add up. But the budget also claims a reduction of 47 FTEs including about 25 new HHSA FTEs that are not General Fund positions. But not with standing, the net increase is 29 FTEs. The big question is that total FTEs can't be reconciled. Somebody is hiding something.

The projected salary and benefit spending for 2016-17 is projected to be \$168.6 million or an increase of \$50 million from just four years ago. That amount is projected to grow at the rate of about \$8 million annually over the next four years. That growth in total dollars out strips revenue growth by about \$10 million. And those numbers do not account for the chance of any employee raises. If that happens (the current contract is over today) it will make these numbers look like pocket change. The county is out of control.

In both the 2015-16 budget and the 2016-17 budget, Pam Knorr, the interim CAO of 15-16 and Larry Combs the past CAO, they used a slight of hand technique to make the employee count look better than it was by comparing the current year to a year in which the county had significantly more employees. In the 15-16 budget, Knorr compared her claimed 1,833 FTEs to 2006-07 when EDC had a total of 2,128 FTEs. That makes it look much better. Combs used the year 2007-08 when FTEs totaled 2,055. But what was left out was that in 2012-13 the county has just 1,703 FTEs, so in reality there has been huge employee growth over the last several years. Just an example of how liars using numbers to make their case.

On top of that, Pam Knorr promised a soft hiring freeze during the prior budget year. It was just a little fib, especially considering that her department, HR, grew by about 15 percent and still remains one of the lower performing departments in the county.

Using a term I dislike to use, our budget continues to be structurally out of balance for the next several years. One of the basic requirements for EDC in obtaining a 40 year, USDA 2.875 percent loan to build the badly needed sheriff's facility which is stated in the loan app is a structurally balanced budget for five years out plus demonstrated funding to make the approximate \$2.2 million annual payment. That loan rate was good until June 30, 2016. Fired CAO Larry Combs wasn't aware of any of the requirements. So at a BOS meeting Combs asks the BOS to direct him to prepare the loan application. So what does Combs do? He hires an outside consultant to do the loan application. I guess the more than dozens of analysts, some with master's degrees, in the CAO's office were incapable. But Combs policy is never pass up a chance to hire your friends. Combs even hired a "part-time helper" to aid the consultant.

And it's the consultant who discovers the structurally balanced budget requirement to qualify for the loan. Combs

never knew. And we paid Combs over \$100 an hour for his services. He doesn't even read and the budget just presented to the BOS was Combs' 2016-17 budget, not Don Ashton's. Ashton had nothing to do with this budget. If Combs would have read some of the basic requirements for the USDA loan, he would have known the truth before he got started and worked to revamp his budget.

I have been writing about Combs' incompetence for about a year. While he is gone now replaced with a real executive, the damage as you can see has been done. But this is just the tip of wreck. More will be discovered, starting with his hiring of the ACAO. There is a waste of about \$200K a year. And for Combs, all during his tenure here he collected \$150K in what should have been illegal CalPERS benefits, plus other pension money of about \$25K a year. Combs' penalty will be the continuation of a total pension of about \$215K a year. Shame on government, including the BOS.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Brown bears use 'human shield' to protect cubs

By Jason Bittel, National Geographic

You might think that winter is the most dangerous time of the year for a young animal. But for Scandinavian brown bear cubs, these next few weeks may determine whether the animal lives or dies.

That's because early May to mid-July is breeding season for Sweden's brown bears. The males, in a desperate attempt to

pass on their DNA, try to mate with every female they come across. This is especially dangerous for females with cubs, because a mother bear cannot become pregnant while she's still nursing last year's litter. That's why male bears will sometimes kill the cubs, forcing the female's body to stop lactating and shift back into reproduction mode.

Over one-third of all brown bear cubs will die during the mating season. And over 90 percent of those fatalities will be at the claws and maws of unrelated males.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe drowning victim identified

The man who drowned at Lake Tahoe on June 25 has been identified as 21-year-old Jawahar Kaliyamurthy.

Douglas County Sheriff's Office did not release where he is from.

People on a boat found him unconscious floating between Meeks Bay and Cave Rock near a personal watercraft. The Good Samaritan began tried CPR until Placer County Marine 6. The boat patrollers continued CPR while transporting the victim to Cave Rock. He was pronounced deceased at the dock.

The cause of death and circumstances surrounding the incident have not been released.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Zero fatalities on Nev. highways over Fourth

This was the first Fourth of July weekend in more than a decade that Nevada did not record a fatality on its highways.

There were two fatal crashes in 2012, 2013 and 2014. In 2015, there were five fatalities.

Last Thursday the Nevada Department of Public Safety and the Nevada Highway Patrol partnered with Uber and MADD in an effort to raise awareness of the dangers of driving under the influence and to offer solutions to drinking and driving. Uber offered discounted ride promo cards throughout Nevada.

Officials are pointing toward those efforts for helping with the results.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Fight in Truckee ends in death of Chico man

A Chico man who was assaulted on the streets of Truckee last month died July 3 at Renown Medical Center in Reno.

Jesse Hill, 39, had been in intensive care with serious head injuries since June 18.

Bryan Luke Sperlin, 24, of Truckee was originally booked on two felony assault charges. Police believe there are a variety of charges that could apply depending on the completed investigation.

“We will continue to collaborate with the District Attorney’s Office and communicate with the victim’s family to find the most appropriate conclusion. Our focus at this point is to continue with a comprehensive and timely investigation that discloses the factual truths about the case,” Truckee police Capt. Rob Leftwich said in a press release.

The official cause of his death will be determined by the Washoe County Medical Examiner’s office after a review of medical documents and an autopsy that is scheduled in the coming days.

Hill was found unconscious on the sidewalk in front of the Pastime Club on June 18 at 11:05pm. Truckee police officers said Hill and Sperlin began arguing earlier in the evening at the Tourist Club bar. Hill left the Tourist Club and was later standing in front of the Pastime Club. As Sperlin was entering the Pastime Club he and Hill began a second argument that led to the physical altercation, officers said.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

1,600 pounds of trash soil Tahoe beaches



Sue Westphal's 5 pounds of trash collected from Kiva Beach on July 5. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – On a normal weekend it takes crews 60 to 90 minutes to clean up the trash at the U.S. Forest Service beaches on the California side of the South Shore. After a holiday weekend like today they need twice as long.

By 9am July 5, Paul Cleveland and Matt Diamond had emptied their cart three times. These bear box containers are emptied every day, so this was just one day's worth of garbage.

When asked if he's found any weird items, Cleveland told *Lake Tahoe News*, "You don't want to know about them."

They don't grip the plastic bags from the bear boxes from the bottom in case there are needles.

This is year eight that Cleveland has been a summer volunteer with the Forest Service. In the last few years he's noticed people are beginning to leave less trash at the beach.



Paul Cleveland and Matt Diamond empty the trash from the bear boxes on July 5 at Kiva. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A lot of this has to do with a lawsuit filed in 2013 by a Marla Bay couple who were tired of the fireworks debris that kept floating on their property. The following year groups like the League to Save Lake Tahoe started organized beach cleanups. This has clearly helped get the beaches clean.

Meyers resident **Kenny Curtzwiler** was ahead of the curve. He started rallying his staff to 2000 to clean the majority of El Dorado Beach, along with Regan Beach and the walkways surrounding Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe.

Now there is also a greater effort to get people to clean up after themselves. The **Take Care campaign** that was launched in 2015 through the Tahoe Fund is one effort.

Sue Westphal of San Jose was one of the League's volunteers at Kiva Beach on Tuesday. She picked up a trash bag of trash. Apparently the next step is to convince people to actually

take their garbage with them.

Hikers and backpackers are familiar with the motto: Pack it In, Pack it Out. Beachgoers, not so much.



Gina Hunt with the League weighs the trash Greg Psilopholos collected. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The League's 330 volunteers collected nearly 1,600 pounds of trash on July 5 from nine beaches in the basin. They were scouring 4.5 miles of shoreline at Kiva Beach, Tallac Historic Site, Regan Beach, El Dorado Beach, Timber Cove, Nevada Beach, Zephyr Shoals, Kings Beach, and Commons Beach on the North Shore.

In that cache were 7,738 cigarette butts. Single use plastics such as straws, plastic bottle caps and bottles also turned up in high numbers.

"There was plenty to pick up (at Nevada Beach), but it's not the worst I've seen it," Chris Carney of the League told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That's the beach Greg and Patty Psilopholos of South Lake Tahoe worked at last year. This July 5 they hauled in 20 pounds at Kiva. Nearly a case of empty Coors cans, clothing, a towel, snorkel, mask and other items were retrieved.

Alexa Burke of South Lake Tahoe brought out 2½-year-old Connor to Kiva for the clean up.

"It's a good activity with the little one," Burke told *Lake Tahoe News*. "You play at the beach and it's like a scavenger hunt."

Mostly what they were finding were cigarette butts.



Alexa and Connor Burke are in search of trash at Kiva.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Paul Klempner of South Lake Tahoe was with his 10-year-old granddaughter, Sophia Arias of Sparks, at Kiva.

“The best part for me was to clean up trash that people didn’t cleanup after themselves. And to keep Tahoe clean,” Sophia told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The heaviest item in her 2 pounds of litter was a Jack Daniel’s bottle.

Lots of bags of dog poop were also found at Kiva; apparently people didn’t realize just bagging isn’t enough.