Lexus UX 250h SUV – Road Test

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THE NEW LEXUS UX 250H PETROL ELECTRIC HYBRID COMPACT SUV…

…Tried and tested by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The new UX 250h petrol-electric hybrid urban SUV is described by Lexus as their ‘gateway’ model to their range of SUVs which already includes the well respected NX mid-sized models, the larger RX versions and the 7-seat RX L variants. Lexus says UX stands for ‘urban explorer’ and they expect it to become their best selling SUV range, attracting new customers to the Lexus brand.

Figures just released by Lexus in the UK show that 99% of their new car sales are for hybrid

models and the brand expects their 2019 full year hybrid sales to increase by 22% over 2018.

All versions of the UX use the new fourth generation Toyota/Lexus self-charging 2.0 litre petrol-electric powertrain with CVT auto transmission with 2WD and E-Four 4WD model options. This new powertrain is also included in the new Toyota Prius and Toyota Corolla ranges.

The core UX 250h model specification line-up is UX, F Sport and Takumi, priced from £29,905 to £39,105. The E-Four 4WD function with added option pack specification included is available across all three spec levels and this raises the price from £36,105 to £40,355.

The UX grade features the second generation Lexus Safety System+, seven-inch Lexus

Navigation and multimedia system with DAB, dual-zone air conditioning, roof rails, 17-inch alloys, start button, auto wipers, acoustic windscreen and e-Call emergency assist.

Key features for the F Sport include F Sport interior and exterior styling features, including F

Sport 18-inch alloy wheels, black front spindle grille and black door mirror housings. In the

cabin there are F Sport front seats with fabric and Tahara upholstery and F Sport pedals and

steering wheel. The specification also includes rear privacy glass, LED front fog lights,

power-adjustable front seats, heated front seats and steering wheel and a memory setting for the heated door mirrors.

The Takumi, named after Lexus's *takumi* craftsmen, offers smooth leather

upholstery, *washi* paper-grain trim inlays, integrated front seat heating and ventilation, a bespoke Mark Levinson 13-speaker Premium Surround Sound system, 10.3-inch Lexus Navigation and multimedia display, 360-degree camera, colour head-up display, sunroof, power tailgate, auto-folding function for the door mirrors, smart entry system, 18-inch alloy wheels, Blind Spot Monitor and Rear Cross Traffic Alert with braking function.

In the premium brand market sector option packs play an important part of fine-tuning a vehicle's specification to customer needs – or 'wants'. There are several of these covering more spec, better sound and infotainment systems, more technology and safety features and the luxury Takumi Pack, with prices ranging from £1,400 to £6,000.



My new model test drive version was the UX 250h with 2WD, priced at the range starter price of £29,905 which looks very competitive. However it was fitted with a Premium Pack costing an extra £2,200 and this added 18-inch alloy wheels, rear privacy glass, parking sensors and heated steering wheel. It was also fitted with the £1,400 Tech & Safety Pack which adds Blind Spot Monitor, Rear Cross Traffic Alert with Auto Brake, head-up display and wireless phone charging tray. All-in-all the test vehicle had an on-the-road price of £33,505. That's still competitive against the opposition which includes petrol and diesel powered Audi Q2/Q3, BMW X1/X2, Mercedes GLA and Range Rover Evoque premium brand models.

At 4,495 mm (14.75 ft) in length the UX 250h five-door urban SUV has most of the design characteristics of larger Lexus SUV models with sharp styling lines, sculptured panels, aerodynamic bodywork angles and a rising waistline with a semi-coupé side profile leading to a forward sloping tailgate. There are prominent black plastic protection edgings to the wheelarches and lower sections of the front and rear bumpers to enhance the SUV look. Above the wide rear haunches are vertical protruding rear light clusters which leads to a light bar across the tailgate. Above the tailgate is a roof spoiler. The tailgate gives access to a modest 320 litre boot (11.30 cu.ft) with quite a high load floor due to the underfloor positioning of the battery pack. In many ways the Lexus 250h urban SUV is similar in dimensions, proportions and styling to the Toyota C-HR which is cheaper and comes with 1.2T turbo petrol and 1.8 self-charging petrol electric hybrid drivetrains.

Despite its 2,640 mm (8.66 ft) long wheelbase the Lexus UX 250h's rear seat legroom is not plentiful and only really adequate for children although two adults can squeeze in for a short journey. Due to the lower rear roof section headroom is also limited and the styling of the rear quarters limits interior width and restricts visibility, so the fitting of parking sensors, rear view camera and the rear cross traffic alert function in the Tech & safety Pack was more than a desirable requirement.

Up front the interior space is ok for a vehicle in this urban class and had all the usual hallmark Lexus high qualities but the seven-inch navigation and infotainment screen was a disappointment. It is not very user friendly and lacks behind what even other non-premium brand SUVs offer these days. Its operation via the usual Lexus trackpad positioned in the centre lower console by the gear selector lever was its usual fiddly self. Otherwise all other controls were well placed and aligned to the driving position very well. The front seats were very comfortable and offered good support. The very dark roof lining with the dark upholstery and soft-touch trim looked smart but gloomy and made the interior feel more compact than it actually was.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Being an SUV styled model the UX 250h is marginally taller, but not to any great extent, as it is designed as an urban vehicle rather than anything likely to go off-road other than a grass field or farm track and that means there was little cornering bodyroll and the vehicle handled more like a hatchback than a lofty riding crossover or SUV. The steering was precise although lacking in feedback but it always felt constant and well-weighted. Despite the fitting of the optional larger 18-inch wheels the ride quality was good on motorways and main roads but became unsettled on poorer road surfaces.

By coincidence I had only just finished test driving the new Toyota Corolla Touring Sports estate with the same 2.0 litre self charging petrol-electric powertrain with its CVT transmission so it was an easy transition as to driving methods and performance of the UX 250h. The 2.0 litre four cylinder variable valve timing engine and electric motor for the 2WD models has a total 181 bhp power output with a 107 bhp electric motor and drive to the front wheels via a CVT transmission. The optional E-Four system uses a small additional 7.1 bhp electric motor in the rear differential to drive the rear wheels, giving marginally extra traction and stability in adverse driving conditions. The hybrid system allows both versions to be driven in EV electric power only mode for a short 1 to 2 miles distance and the battery is additionally charged through the regenerative braking system at all times, hence its self-charging nature.



The self-charging hybrid system works best with the electric motor taking over from the engine at low speeds for in-town driving and during the overrun on other journeys. On motorways or A-roads, where there are fewer chances for regenerative braking, the petrol engine is mostly in use although with some assist during acceleration from the electric motor. Top speed for both 2WD and 4WD versions is 110 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 8.5 seconds for the 2WD models and 8.7 seconds for the 4WD versions.

Officially the Combined Cycle fuel economy is 49.5 to 53.2 mpg for the 2WD versions and 46.3 to 47 mpg for the 4WD models. My test driving for a week of motoring with long and short journeys with the 2WD model was exactly 49 mpg and of course being self-charging there are no range anxiety or electric charging point issues for long journeys. As for CO2 emissions the 2WD model with 18-inch wheels is 97 g/km so VED Alternative Fuel First Year

road tax is £120 and then £135 Standard rate for year two onwards. Company car tax is rated as 23% and insurance is Group 22E. The E-Four 4WD model's figures for comparison are 46.3 to 47 mpg, CO2 103 g/km VED £140/£135, company car tax 24% and insurance Group up to Group 26 depending on spec grade.



VERDICT

Overall the new Lexus UX 250h offers most of the excellent credentials of the brand's hybrid models and at its starter price the model I tested is a good stepping stone into the brand. Yes there are niggles with space, rear quarter visibility, poor sat-nav and infotainment usability and not least that Lexus models only have a three year/60,000 mile warranty when

Toyota models using the same technologies have a five year/100,000 mile warranty. The response as to why there is a difference in these warranty periods is – and I quote: “We introduced the five year warranty after/during a throttle pedal recall to reassure our Toyota customers”. Now we know!

For: The base model is a good stepping stone into the premium brand SUV market, distinctive edgy Lexus exterior styling, comfortable front seats, compliant ride, good fuel economy and low tax costs.

Against: Cramped rear interior space, restricted rear quarter visibility, small boot, poor sat-nav/infotainment system, ungenerous warranty – less than Toyota offers.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Lexus UX 250h, 2WD, self-charging petrol-electric Urban SUV.

Price: £29,905 (£33,505 as tested).

Drivetrain: 2.0 litre, four cylinder variable valve timing engine with electric motor with a total hybrid system maximum output 181 bhp, CVT auto transmission, 2WD.

Performance: 110 mph, 0–62 mph 8.5 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 49.5 to 53.2 mpg (49 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 97 g/km, Alternative fuel VED First Year rate £120 then £135 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 23%.

Insurance Group: 22E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,495 mm (14.75 ft), W 1,840 mm (6.04 ft), H 1,540 mm (5.05 ft), wheelbase 2,640 mm (8.66 ft), boot/load space 320 to 1,231 litres (11.30 to 43.72 cu.ft), braked towing weight 750 kg (1,653 lb), five doors/four to five seats.