



Lexus CT 200h

Impossibly good

Car review | "Tax should be a deductible expense", a comedian once said. People have the most impossible wishes. A car should be lighteningly fast, yet extremely frugal. To add to that, many would love to drive a Lexus, but at the price of an ordinary car. Supposedly the "Lexus CT 200h" makes all those wishes come true.

What makes this Lexus more affordable than the other models is the technology under the bonnet. Although it may sound strange, the CT 200h has two engines rather than one and that makes it more affordable and more economical. An internal-combustion engine is most efficient at high, constant speeds on long distances. An electric motor is best at low speeds and doesn't mind changes in pace. The "hybrid" drive of this smallest Lexus combines both of these technologies to realise the lowest possible fuel consumption.



A computer decides which engine is used at what time, so the driver doesn't have to. Also, the batteries required to power the electric motor are charged while driving, so the CT 200h never has to be charged via mains power.

Performance

Although driving the CT 200h doesn't require any

special skills, the experience does differ significantly from a normal car. After pressing the start button, the cabin remains perfectly silent. The CT 200h can be propelled by the electric motor alone up to speeds of 30 mph. The petrol engine only assists when necessary and does so with little extra noise or vibrations.

With a push of a button the driver can choose a normal, eco or sporty behaviour. In the normal mode the CT 200h effortlessly trots along with traffic and excels in comfort. The hybrid technology is the same as used by Toyota's green icon: the Prius. Some say the CT 200h is no more than a Prius in a business suit, but even a few metres of driving prove them wrong. The CT 200h has the refinement of a true Lexus.



In "eco" mode the throttle's reaction is less direct, to encourage the driver to slow down. Gas guzzlers like the air conditioning also step back a notch in order to save fuel. In city traffic or on winding roads, the CT 200h is disturbingly slow in eco mode. On highways, performance is still sufficient and the eco mode effectively improves fuel economy.

The sporty mode is announced by red "mood lighting" of the dials. The "eco" gauge is replaced by a more traditional rev counter. The steering is noticeably heavier, so the driver has a better feeling of the car. The electric motor and petrol engine now work at the same time for maximum performance. Even now the CT 200h isn't a particularly fast car, but performance is certainly decent.



The CT is fitted with an automatic gearbox as standard. This doesn't have any fixed gear ratios, but instead creates an ideal ratio depending on the situation. This again improves gas mileage, but also causes an annoying whining noise. When driving slowly, the "CVT" automatic gearbox does increase comfort, because the car seems to accelerate in one fluent move.

Fuel economy

According to Lexus, the CT 200h uses as little as 3.8 litres of petrol per 100 km or 74.3 mpg (CO₂: 87 grams per kilometre). This would make this Lexus even more frugal than Toyota's own hybrid models. Regrettably this incredible figure cannot be realised in real life. The test vehicle was equipped with 16 inch rims, which means the car uses 4.1 litres per 100 km or 68.8 mpg (94 grams of CO₂ per km) according to Lexus. Despite all efforts the best possible fuel consumption was 4.6 litres per 100 km (61.4 mpg), even with a top speed of no more than 50 mph.



When calmly driving along with traffic, the trip computer shows a fuel mileage of 5.7 litres per 100 km (49.6 mpg). Using more than 6.6 litres per 100 km (42.8 mpg) is hardly possible, not even when regularly cruising at the top speed of 180 km/h (112 mph).



Handling

Driving a Lexus should give a privileged and superior feeling. Although performance is no more than adequate, handling is absolutely sublime. During design, Lexus engineers did everything possible to concentrate the bulk of the weight in the middle of the car. For example, the batteries are placed in front of the rear axle and whenever possible lightweight materials have been used. The latter goes so far that even the amplifier of the audio system weighs less than usual.

For a Lexus, the suspension is unusually firm and that suits the character of the car. The result of all efforts is a direct feeling in the steering wheel and more than excellent handling. Other premium cars offer a feeling of superiority thanks to their oversized engine which always has a huge reserve; the CT 200h owes its superior feeling to the suspension which is always capable of more. Despite its green credentials, the CT therefore offers lots of driving pleasure.



The so-called "straight line stability" is also of exemplary quality. Without any corrections, the CT travels in a straight line. This may not be noticeable at first, but on long distances it certainly makes driving this car less demanding. The CT has powerful and perfectly controllable brakes, adding to a great feeling of safety.

A real Lexus

When seen straight from the front, the CT is a real Lexus thanks to its self-assured looks. From the side, it is obvious that the overhang in front is larger than behind. Because of this it seems like the body wants to overtake the wheels and that doesn't look good. To put it mildly: the CT is Lexus' first hatchback and it shows. When seen from the rear, the CT has very little charisma and looks suspiciously like a Subaru Impreza.



An important part of the "Lexus experience" is the perception of quality. Build quality is excellent and the doors close with a solid bang (or rather: the lack thereof). The head and legroom in the front is fine. The space required for the batteries does go at the expense of the legroom in the rear, which is poor. Adults can only sit comfortably in the back when the driver and co-driver move their seats forward. The boot measures 350 litres (expandable to 985 l), which is above average for a car this size.

Considering the price, the standard trim level is fine. The audio system with ten loudspeakers sounds remarkably well for a car in this price range. Regrettably the satnav that goes along with it, is the same as in older Lexus models, while Toyota has a (much) better one available. With the right options the CT can be fitted with all luxury and creature comforts available on the larger models. This is why the CT 200h is much more than just another car.

Conclusion

Does Lexus achieve the impossible with the "CT 200h"? Mostly: yes! Thanks to its hybrid drive, performance is decent while fuel economy is excellent. However, in real life the CT isn't as frugal as Lexus will lead one to believe. On the other hand: handling is sublime, so the car does offer the full Lexus experience. In short: the CT offers the same comfort levels and driving pleasure as the bigger models, yet at a much lower price. Until recently, that seemed like an impossibility. ■



Specifications

Lexus CT 200h 200h SE-L Premier

Size and weight



Length x width x height	432 x 177 x 143 cm
Wheelbase	260 cm
Kerb weight	1.370 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	45 l
Luggage space	375/985 l
Tyre size	R17

Engine and performance



Capacity	1798 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	99 PS @ 5200 rpm
Max torque	142 Nm @ 4000 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.3 secs
Top speed	180 km/h
Average mileage	3.8 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	3.9 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	3.7 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	89 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 30,635
Price base model	Â£ 23,485