



Lexus NX

The smartest

Review | SUVs are tough, spacious and comfortable. They are also expensive, both to run and acquire. That is why most brands now offer a smaller SUV next to their line of traditional big models. Lexus is one of the last manufacturers to introduce a compact SUV. It claims it will beat the competition in every way. Lexus even promises the NX handles better, is more frugal and prettier than the competition. Let's give it a try!

To start with the latter: "pretty" is a matter of personal opinion. But, everyone will agree that the NX clearly distinguishes itself from the masses. Lexus opted for straight angles and combines this with muscular proportions.

On the inside all is familiar. Lexus uses a high quality materials in the cabin that look a lot less futuristic than the outside of the car would suggest. Lexus even emphasises that wood from Yamaha pianos has been used. Great, but it doesn't suit the rest of the car. Where's the carbon, aluminium or even the magnesium?



The dashboard wraps around the driver and passenger, which is typical for Lexus. While some SUVs almost overwhelm the occupants with a feeling of spaciousness, the NX is cosy and intimate like a coupé. The driver is almost laying down, like in a sports car. The space in the back (with an electrically adjustable back seat) is excellent, and the same goes for the boot.

Equipment levels

With the right options, the NX features everything

Lexus has to offer when it comes to technology. This starts with the usual suspects like radar guided cruise control, a fully automatic parking assistant, automatic steering impulse when accidentally crossing the lines on the road and the sublime Mark Levinson audio system (although the latter sounds even better in the cheaper Lexus IS).



The combined audio, satnav and communication system is operated by a touchpad. Its surface changes according to the information on the display, so it feels like there are real buttons underneath the surface. While this idea is pretty clever, in real life it is less convenient than the rotating commander button other brands use.

Another new feature for the NX is wireless charging. Depending on the phone used, this requires either a cradle (iPhone) or a sticker with a USB-connector (Android). Wireless charging is convenient, easy and effective and yet 5 minutes after the test drive started the phone was connected by a cable. To fully enjoy the sound quality of the Mark Levinson audio system a Bluetooth connection simply doesn't suffice.



The most useful feature is "head-up display", which projects important information for the driver onto the windscreen making it float in his/her view like real-life subtitles. This works so well that it makes one wonder why carmakers still bother to install traditional speedometers and rev counters. One word of warning: the Lexus head-up display is hardly readable when wearing Polaroid sunglasses (which has never been an issue with other cars).

Hybrid: in theory

The unique selling point of any Lexus is of course hybrid drive. Underneath the bonnet both an internal combustion engine and an electric motor can be found. The idea is that a lot of energy is being wasted while braking or coasting. The hybrid drive system converts this wasted energy into electricity, which is later utilised by the electric motor to assist the petrol engine. When the petrol engine needs little power (city traffic) the electric engine takes over, considerably increasing efficiency.



The computer decides which engine is used and when energy is being recuperated. The driver can influence this by choosing either the "eco" mode (which aims at maximum efficiency) or "sports" mode (which uses both engines at the same time for maximum performance). In city traffic, the NX can be powered by the electric motor alone but only for about 3 kilometres.



Hybrid: in real life

The combined output of both engines is 197 PS / 210 Nm. This seems like a lot of power, but in fact performance isn't impressive at all. Pushing the throttle harder results in more noise, but not in spectacular performance (0 to 62 mph takes 9.2 seconds, top speed is 180 km/h). To make matters even worse the CVT ("automatic") gearbox produces a whining noise when accelerating hard. This is odd, because Lexus managed to solve this problem in the recently renewed CT.

The biggest advantage of hybrid drive technology is its efficiency. According to Lexus, the NX consumes 5 litres per 100 km (56 mpg) on average. In several countries this results in considerable tax cuts.



In daily traffic these low figures cannot be realised.

Even when trying to drive as economically as possible 5.9 litres per 100 km (48 mpg) was the best result. Over the entire test drive, including some sporty driving, the average fuel consumption was 6.4 litres per 100 km (44 mpg). That is about the same as the consumption of the diesel engines of comparable SUVs from other brands, so the NX still manages to impress with its green credentials.

Another benefit: a hybrid drive car is much more comfortable than a traditional car. At low speeds, the NX is like an electric car. That doesn't just mean absolute silence, but also a more refined run than any internal combustion engine could deliver. When driving on the open road, the petrol engine purrs in the background as if the NX is a big limousine. The 2.5-litre-four-cylinder engine doesn't have to work very hard, because the electric motor will assist whenever more power is required.



Handling

The basic Lexus NX is a front-wheel drive car. Optionally the NX can be fitted with a second electric motor, which powers the rear wheels. This is merely a safety feature - the Lexus NX is not an off-road car in any way.

Thanks to its modest measurements the NX isn't an intimidating car to drive. The high seating position does provide a better view over traffic than in a basic car. Despite the height, the NX hardly tilts over in the corner. In city traffic the NX is easy to handle, however, the turning circle is disturbingly large.

Steering is light, yet provides sufficient feedback. This is why every driver will notice that the NX is a very well balanced car. Even when driving fast, the advanced underpinning handles every bump in the road perfectly.

Still, the NX isn't fun to drive in the way a sports car is fun to drive. Instead the NX does everything with more ease than other cars. The driver doesn't feel like they're operating a mighty machine. Quite the opposite: the NX driver achieves more while doing less and this makes the NX the smartest car in its class.

Conclusion

Lexus is one of the very last premium brands to introduce a compact SUV. An extensive test drive learns that Lexus used its time well. The NX offers everything its rivals offer, except for one thing. According to Lexus the customer doesn't want off-road capabilities and therefore the carmaker was free to solely focus on on-road qualities.

Handling can be summarised as comfortable with a sporty accent. When it comes to space and luxury the NX also passes with flying colours. Finally, the hybrid drive results in higher comfort, lower fuel consumption and lower running costs. Whether this makes the Lexus NX better than the rest is a matter of personal opinion. While the NX isn't an exciting car to drive, its smart technology does make it do everything effortlessly. ■



Specifications

Lexus NX 300h SE 4wd

Size and weight



Length x width x height	463 x 185 x 165 cm
Wheelbase	266 cm
Kerb weight	1.785 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	1.500 kg
Fuel capacity	56 l
Luggage space	unknown
Tyre size	225/65R17

Engine and performance



Capacity	2494 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	197 PS @ 5700 rpm
Max torque	210 Nm @ 4200 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	9.2 secs
Top speed	180 km/h
Average mileage	5.1 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	5.1 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	5 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	117 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 31,495
Price base model	Â£ 29,495