



Deliberately choosing to be different

Richard Webb tries the Lexus UX and discovers a cool and calm self-charging hybrid SUV underneath its nonconformist metal origami.

I spend much of my life talking to automotive designers, marketers, engineers and importantly, buyers of cars. It is true that there are very few bad cars being made any more, and there are now mostly very good ones that consume less and offer more. Making decisions about what car to buy is a deeply personal journey, with dozens of marques and hundreds of iterations available. These are further split into petrol, diesel, electric power (EV's), various hybrid types and body styles.

Lexus lifestyle

Today, carmakers often seem to offer cars designed around a 'lifestyle', and this is no bad thing. Hybrid and EV's are becoming

increasingly common and can be an excellent choice, particularly if you do a fair amount of town driving. In my situation, living in Stony Stratford and commuting around Milton Keynes and then longer journeys from there, I was keen to see how the latest self-charging hybrid vehicle would serve my lifestyle.

Lexus asked me to try their new baby SUV, the UX. This is their Urban Crossover, a hybrid that slots in the model range underneath the popular NX and larger RX. Designed more for the city and urban life, it doesn't try to be an off-roader, even it can be ordered with the optional E-Four four-wheel drive across the range.

The E-Four four-wheel drive system is only available in conjunction with extra option packs, which pushes the price up at least £6000, depending on the option packs specified. All models are available only as a 2-litre petrol engine combined with an electric motor. Official combined fuel economy is a reasonable 53.2mpg, with CO2 emissions of just 94g/km.

Striking design

I am a fan of the current Lexus design language, with its sharp, angular design and 'spindle grille' marking it out boldly as a Lexus. It's a striking looker and has obvious accoutrements of a premium SUV that stands out from the German and Swedish offerings.

People buy from people

I firmly believe that people buy from people, rather than from dealerships. I spoke to Lexus Milton Keynes Sales Manager, Simon Cordery about his customers and the business model they operate. "Everyone here completely buys in to the 'creating amazing' guiding principles. We are a friendly, compassionate dealership, yet we relentlessly push the boundaries of customer care. We want the customer experience to be as amazing as the car itself."

Lexus Milton Keynes have cultivated an insightful understanding of customer wants and needs. "We spend a lot of time thinking and caring about each of our customer's well-being and we treat each one as a true individual," concludes Cordery.



"If you are ready to go hybrid, the UX is a worthy alternative to the normal line-up of luxury family SUVs."

Sliding into the cabin, it immediately becomes obvious that the ambience is easily a match for its exterior boldness. Not only is it beautifully made with quality materials everywhere your hands fall to, there are obvious hallmarks of high standards of craftsmanship. 'My' car came fitted with the Takumi specification and was equipped with a 10.3in infotainment screen with DVD player, head-up display, a fantastic Mark Levinson sound system, leather upholstery and electric sunroof.

There is a blizzard of buttons to contend with, but they are all positioned easily for the driver, and have a high-quality, tactile feel to them too. I did not have the car long enough to fully explore the menu layout of the infotainment

system and relied instead on a few 'shortcut buttons' positioned around the centre console and dashboard.

There's loads of leg head and room in the front, and rear passenger space is average for the class. Boot space is a practical, square shape and with the rear seats up, it can take 438 litres of luggage. For stowage there's a large glovebox and two cupholders up front. Even the entry-level UX trim comes with six-way manual seat adjustment, but my test car came with electric eight-way adjustment with variable lumbar support, which is standard on F-Sport and Takumi versions, which meant I had no trouble finding a driving position that suited me. Abundant and innovative

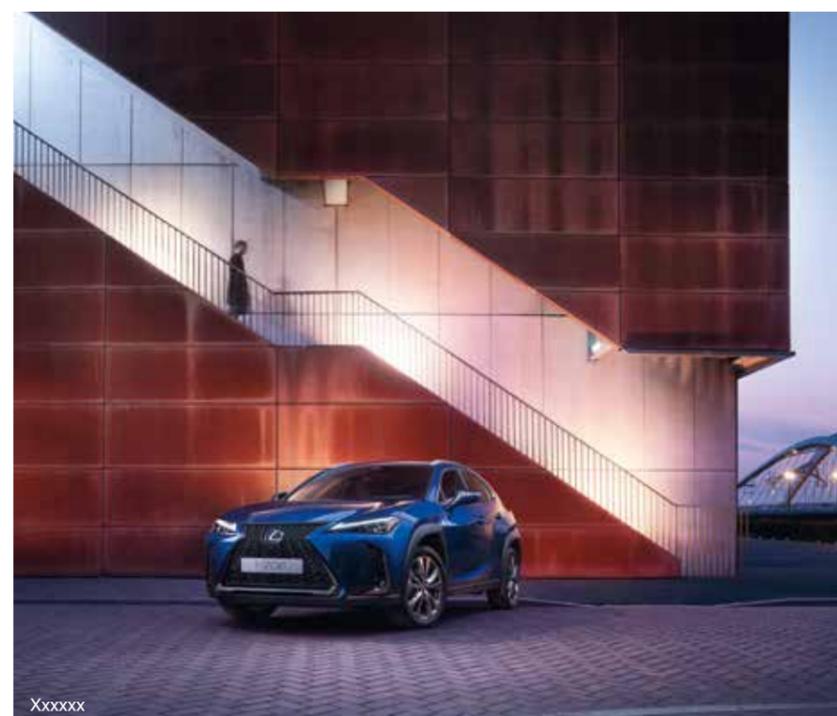
driving aids easily compensate for restricted visibility from the narrow rear windscreen when reversing.

Powertrain

The UX's hybrid powertrain offers up a combined power output of 181bhp and is smoothly delivered and delicately measured, particularly around the city. This helps to make it a smooth, and comfortable car to drive. Potholes don't seem to unsettle the car and there's little in the way of engine, wind or road noise either. All this adds to the zen-like serenity of the drive experience, where all anxieties induced by busy traffic seem to evaporate.

Unlike earlier drivetrains, the hybrid CVT system doesn't make itself heard all that much when you accelerate. Body roll is minimal, and the car remains nicely composed even when you're darting from roundabout to roundabout. It feels very nippy and is able to accelerate quickly and safely in and out of traffic, making it feel quite fun to drive.

Modern cars are created with skill and attention to detail. Pursuit of perfection is at every stage of the manufacturing process is one thing, but it is the interface between manufacture and sale where relationships are won or lost.



Get in touch today to arrange your test drive of the Lexus UX.
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