

2010 Lexus IS-C

By Steve Schutz, MD



The IS line is Lexus' answer to the BMW 3-series, a dominating car if there ever was one. Coveted the world over, the 3-series is the car a young advertiser buys when she lands her first big account, or a junior surgeon gets as he nears the end of his orthopedic residency. No respectable luxury automaker can compete in the marketplace without a 3-series rival, and Lexus is as respectable as they get.

So, Lexus introduced the IS sedan in 2000, a wagon-ish hatchback in 2002, and then the second generation IS sedan in 2006. And since BMW sells lots of 3-series convertibles, no one was surprised to see the Lexus IS-C drop-top debut in 2009.

A hard top drop-top, the IS-C has the typical drawbacks of that type of vehicle, to wit a Kim Kardashian-esque posterior—needed to hold the top when it's down—and minimal trunk space when the top's down because it's so big. Whether those drawbacks are show stoppers will depend on how much you value a solid (and quiet) top when it's up, and how much you enjoy the wind-in-the-hair driving experience when it's down.

Like the 3-series, the IS-C looks very similar to its four-door sibling, which is a good thing. The IS sedan's lines still please after five years, and the IS-C is attractive from most angles, too. I'd like to see the design refreshed, though.

Behind the wheel, the IS-C feels similar to the IS sedan, only softer and a tad bit slower. The extra 500 or so pounds the IS-C has to carry around is the main culprit, but I suspect Lexus engineers tuned the suspension and throttle response more for "regular" drivers and less for enthusiasts. Still, drive the IS-C the way it was designed, "regular-like", if you will, and you'll be pleased.

Pleased also describes how the driver and front passenger will feel about the roominess and layout of the interior. Headroom is ample for anyone up to 6'2" or so, and the gauges and controls are typical Lexus—that is to say logical, nice to touch and handsome. There's no Remote Touch as in the RX crossover unfortunately, but the touch screen is fine.

It's doubtful anyone consigned to the rear seats will describe their experience as pleasing, though. It's tight back there with the top up—tighter than the BMW 3-series convertible—and with the top down, windy and loud at highway speeds. Again, experiencing the joys of top-down motoring brings drawbacks.

There are two versions of the 2010 Lexus IS-C, the IS 250C and IS 350C. The former is powered by a 2.5-liter V6 that provides 204 HP and 185 lb-ft of torque, while the latter comes with a 3.5 liter V6 pump-

ing out a more impressive 306 HP and 277 lb-ft of torque. Both engines feature direct injection.

Rear-wheel drive and a six-speed manual are standard on the IS 250C, but a six-speed automatic transmission with paddle shifters is available if you—like most IS-C buyers—would prefer one. All IS 350C models come with the automatic.

Published figures put zero to 60 mph acceleration times at 8.4 seconds for the IS 250C and 5.8 seconds for the IS 350C. I tested the IS 350C and therefore can't comment on the model with the smaller engine, but I was impressed with the 350C's performance. It isn't BMW M3 fast, but buyers need not fear embarrassment at stoplights—the IS 350C is perfectly capable of scooting whenever you need to.

The EPA estimates fuel economy for the automatic IS 250C at 21 mpg city and 29 mpg highway; the manual at 18/26, and the IS 350C at 18/25.

Standard equipment on the IS 250C includes 17-inch wheels, automatic headlights, heated side mirrors, keyless ignition/entry, power tilt-telescoping steering column, power front seats, leather seating surfaces, dual-zone automatic climate control, auto-dimming rearview mirror, Bluetooth, and an eight-speaker stereo with in-dash six-CD changer, USB and iPod jack.

The Luxury Package adds adaptive bi-xenon headlights, automatic wipers, auto-dimming exterior mirrors, upgraded leather upholstery, heated and cooled front seats with memory, wood accents, and electronic slide/return rear-seat access. The xenon lights and heated/cooled seats are also available as stand-alone options. A navigation system with real-time traffic and a back-up camera is also an option and can be bundled with the 12-speaker Mark Levinson surround sound system.

Other extras include 18-inch wheels, electronic park assist, adaptive cruise control with pre-safe collision preparation, and some Lexus F-Sport performance upgrades.

The IS-C is Lexus' answer to the BMW 3-series convertible, and it's a good one. No, it's not as driver-focused as the BMW 3, but it's still nice to drive and very "Lexus-y". And for many Lexus owners used to excellent dealer service and pampering, that'll be enough. ☺

