

Driving the LFA

By Steve Schutz, MD

I drove the Lexus LFA today. And it blew my mind!

What's a Lexus LFA, you may be wondering. Around ten years ago Lexus toyed with the idea of producing a Ferrari fighting supercar, and they went back and forth for quite a while before finally deciding to build it. Why did they wait so long? Umm, maybe because the LFA didn't make any sense. Honestly, Lexus doesn't belong in the Ferrari playground. But here they are, and I'm glad Lexus ignored naysayers like me and launched the LFA anyway.

Let me explain. Lexus does very well competing against BMW, Mercedes and Cadillac. They make superb cars and SUVs that make many BCMS members happy. Heck, they make me happy—I'm a BCMS member who owns a Lexus LX 570 and love it. Why should Lexus get out of their comfort zone and mess with Ferrari? You see my point, it doesn't make any sense.

But maybe Lexus had gotten too comfortable, too risk averse. While BMW, Cadillac, Audi, and even Porsche have been aggressively shaking up their portfolios and attacking the market, Lexus has been sitting tight. Except for a couple niche hybrids, Japan's premier luxury automaker hasn't done anything interesting since they introduced the current IS sedan almost six years ago. That's a long time in the auto industry, especially in the luxury segment, so maybe Toyota released the LFA more to inspire their Lexus employees than anything else.

My two cents is that's why the LFA is here; and after driving it, I'm even more sure. It's an amazing vehicle that can't help but inspire anyone who goes anywhere near it.



Like many of you, I'd seen the LFA countless times before. I'd seen the commercial with the LFA and the champagne glasses. I had read the articles in AutoWeek and Car and Driver. I knew this car. Still, while I could spot its lines online from six feet, the LFA was Gwyneth Paltrow to me: I knew I was supposed to be turned on, but I wasn't. At all.

Then I sat down in its supportive seats, fired up the 552 HP V10 engine, and headed out onto Infineon raceway in Sonoma, CA. And everything changed. Completely.

I'd already taken a bunch of laps in the fast V8 Lexus IS-F sedan, but this was different. Every turn arrived oh-no-it's-here NOW, those corners were taken much faster than I thought they could be, and every straight scared me. Loud and surprisingly raw, the LFA was a true supercar in that it had capability that I could only dream of reaching, yet I found myself pushing through my previous psychological limits over and over again just to experience the rush. Driving this unusual Lexus at the track was brutally good, intoxicating and, yes—inspiring.

Frankly, I suspect Lexus will struggle to sell all 500 LFAs—they're priced higher than the Ferrari 458 Italia and Lamborghini Gallardo, after all. But if the LFA inspires Lexus engineers and designers to create cool vehicles to compete with the likes of the Audi A5, Mercedes CLS, and Porsche Panamera, it will have been worth the cost. As a Lexus fan, I hope that happens. 🍀



2011 Cadillac CTS Wagon

By Steve Schutz, MD

General Motors is on a roll, and excellent cars like the new Cadillac CTS Wagon are the main reason why. Still, while GM is making some great cars now, many of GM's vehicles over the past thirty years were awful.

I recently read a book going through GM's product history and it was depressing, especially the cars from the 1970s and 1980s. The Chevy Vega of the 1970s was pretty bad, but the 1980s were even worse with the over-hyped Chevrolet Citation, ridiculous Cadillac Cimarron, and ugly FWD Oldsmobile Cutlass. That was a bad decade, and the 1990s weren't much better.

In my opinion, the turning point for GM came in 2001 when then-CEO Rick Wagoner hired noted car guy and BMW/Ford/Chrysler veteran Bob Lutz and said, essentially, "fix our products". And Bob did. (Overall, I think Rick Wagoner did a pretty good job at GM, his famous firing by President Obama notwithstanding. But that's a discussion for business writers, not me.)

Anyway, the way Bob Lutz fixed things was to take GM's cars and trucks, which were aesthetically unappealing but largely well-built and reliable by the time he arrived, and make them more attractive with better designs and nicer interiors. Ten years later, we see the fruits of his labors: the gorgeous Buick Enclave, cool Chevy Camaro, and sleek Cadillac CTS, which brings me back to the CTS Wagon, a gorgeous piece if there ever was one.

The CTS sedan looks great, and GM's design chief, Ed Welburn—with Bob Lutz' enthusiastic backing—successfully created very attractive coupe and wagon variants of the CTS, which took some doing. Plus, the CTS Wagon achieves Cadillac's goal of creating a CTS sedan "with a backpack."

Nevertheless, like BMW's 5-series and Audi's A6 wagons, the CTS Wagon *raison d'être* is to add functionality to the CTS, not be a slimmed down Escalade, so don't expect packaging miracles. The rear storage area holds just 25 ft³ (cubic feet) of stuff and 53 ft³



with the rear seats folded—nice, but certainly not enough to help your neighbors move.

The interior is a very nice place to spend time, integrating an appealing mix of wood

accents, tasteful aluminum-ish trim, and a soft-touch dash. And a large (optional) navigation screen retracts into the dash when not needed, leaving the top inch visible as the touchscreen display for the audio system. Very cool.

Overall comfort inside the CTS Wagon is good, though the seats aren't up to Volvo standards, and there's less elbow room than the Mercedes E-class or BMW 5-series. In addition, rearward visibility is limited by the tapered roofline, which also makes access to the hatch area a little tricky.

Thanks to an athletic suspension and muscular V6 engine, the CTS Wagon drives just like the CTS sedan, as you'd expect. Maybe I should say engines; there are actually two V6s available, both of which come standard with rear-wheel drive and a six-speed manual, while a six-speed automatic and all-wheel drive are available as options. The base 3.0-liter engine produces 270 HP with fuel economy figures of 18 MPG city/27 MPG highway, while the optional direct-injection 3.6-liter V6 produces 304 HP and fuel economy of 18 MPG city/27 highway. For the record, a 3.6 rear-drive Wagon goes from zero to 60 MPG in around 7.0 seconds.

The CTS Wagon is available in five trim levels: 3.0 base, 3.0 Lux-

ury, 3.0 Performance, 3.6 Performance, and 3.6 Premium.

Standard equipment on the 3.0 includes 17-inch alloy wheels, power liftgate, automatic headlights, dual-zone automatic climate control, eight-way power driver seat, tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, auto-dimming rearview mirror, and eight-speaker audio system with CD changer, satellite radio, and iPod connectivity. The 3.0 Luxury adds a power passenger seat, heated front seats, driver memory functions, leather seating surfaces, a wood-and-leather steering wheel, rearview camera, Bluetooth, and six-CD changer.

The CTS 3.0 Performance gives you all the Luxury's equipment plus 18-inch wheels, better brakes and suspension, and adaptive HID headlights. The 3.6 Performance adds the bigger motor and an upgraded stereo with digital music storage.

A Luxury Level Two package, which can be added to the Performance package, includes rear parking sensors, heated and cooled front seats, power steering column, keyless ignition/entry, and remote engine start. The 3.6 Premium adds a panoramic sunroof and a hard-drive-based navigation system with real-time traffic and weather information.

The Cadillac CTS Wagon is further evidence that GM has put the awful 1970s and '80s behind it. It's a pleasure to drive, is well constructed, looks terrific, and has an interior that's satisfying to sit in. Hallelujah GM, and keep the good cars and trucks coming! And thank you, Bob Lutz, wherever you are.



Stephen (Steve) Schutz, MD is a board-certified Gastroenterologist who lived in San Antonio when he served in the Air Force in the 1990s. He has been writing auto reviews for the BCMS San Antonio Medicine for sixteen years. 🇺🇸

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