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Bigger and better Lexus RX 350

By Thomas Huong

LEXUS Malaysia has high hopes for its new RX 350 crossover luxury SUV (sport utility vehicle).

The company is targeting to sell 105 units of the third-generation RX 350, imported from Japan, this year.

From April 2007 till January this year, only 63 units of the RX 350 have been sold in the country.

"We have received 15 bookings for the new RX 350. Despite the difficult economic climate, we are confident the new RX 350 will do well due to its high specifications and competitive pricing," said UMW Toyota Motor Sdn Bhd and Lexus Malaysia president Kuah Kock Heng during the vehicle's official launch last Thursday at the Lexus Centre, Mutiara Damansara.

The new Lexus RX 350 is slightly bigger and offers better performance as well higher passenger comfort levels.

According to Lexus Malaysia, it also offers a lower fuel consumption of four per cent, compared with the previous model, despite a kerb weight that is heavier by about 140kg.

Selected members of the media were treated to a sneak preview of



Unlike the previous RX 350, the front grille is now fused with the bumper.

the new Lexus RX 350 in Cyberjaya last Wednesday, and we found the SUV featuring new headlights and a redesigned front end, which helps to allo-



Dashboard is divided into an upper display screen and lower operation zone. Missing in the local spec is the i-Drive-like controller.

Safety system VDIM is also new here, as it coordinates features such as VSC (vehicle stability control), TRC (traction control), BA (brake assist), ABS and EBD (electronic brake force distribution).

The six-speed automatic transmission is also new.

Although the engine remains the same, there is a slight increase in torque (4Nm more).

Its double wishbone rear suspension is also another new feature.

Another change here is the Active Torque Control all-wheel drive system that monitors and controls torque transfer between the front and rear wheels, depending on driving dynam-

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The real McCoy

FOR years, the Lexus RX luxury crossover has had to contend with a sibling pretender – a lower specification stablemate sold under the Toyota brand called the Toyota Harrier.

While the Lexus commanded a premium due to its higher specifications, trim levels and stringent Lexus craftsmanship and quality,

that didn't stop some Harrier owners from cleverly "upgrading" their cars by plonking on Lexus badges on their Toyotas.

Now that Toyota Motor Corp has ceased the production of the Harrier, the latest third generation RX is the exclusive owner of its name.

So if you happen to see a new RX these days, you can bet it's the real McCoy.

We got up close and personal with the newly-minted RX 350 at a media sneak preview in Cyberjaya last week. Reworked from ground up, the RX 350 is bigger and roomier but still retains its familiar profile and styling DNA.

A bulbous bonnet with a larger grille and more pronounced mus-

cular lines that run along the sides set the tone for a beefy-looking car. Clever new touches include the rear screen wiper tucking into the rear roof spoiler for a cleaner and more elegant back view.

A redesigned dashboard and cabin layout decked out in walnut and dark leather trimmings inject a classy feel and atmosphere inside.

Under the bonnet is the 3.5l engine from the older model that has been tweaked to 273 horses with maximum torque of 346Nm, and the automatic transmission goes up one extra gear to six speeds.

The RX 350 proved to be a quite a sprinter with acceleration coming in smoothly and rapidly though the vehicle is rather heavy at close to two tonnes. It now handles better, partly due to the use of the double-wishbone rear suspension system, in place of MacPherson struts.

The RX 350 also offers 10 air bags, including knee airbags for the driver and front passengers – something which many competitors lack.

Other standard features include vehicle dynamics integrated management which integrates steering,



The Lexus RX 350's gearshifter knob comes leather wrapped with a walnut insert.

braking, stability and traction systems for better vehicle control, anti-lock braking system, 18-inch wheels, bi-xenon headlights with adaptive front-lighting system, sunroof, power tailgate, Lexus Premium Audio system and Keyless Go system.

Sold by Lexus Malaysia, it goes for RM387,038 (OTR with insurance).



All-new Lexus RX 350 looks beefier and is also bigger and roomier than the previous model.

The Lexus RX 350's rear screen wiper will tuck itself into the rear roof spoiler when not in use.