



MailMotor

Japan's answer to European sports sedans

By T. YOGENDRA

WHEN Lexus first entered the luxury car segment, many people scoffed at it, saying it was merely a more expensive Toyota under a different and more stylish name.

However, the brand soon succeeded in the United States market, something that spread across Asia and Europe.

The parallel importers in Malaysia hardly made things any better as they sold these brands side by side. But over the years, Malaysians actually paid a higher premium just to have the Lexus badge on their cars.

The Lexus IS series is a completely different car now, especially with the new facelift version introduced here recently.

I had a chance to review the car almost immediately after its launch and was quite surprised. Having missed out on the earlier version, it was a time of discovery.

Everyone seems to be comparing it with the more established BMW 3-series and Mercedes C-Class, but I don't



see it that way.

In the new facelift version, the front bumper has been redesigned, incorporating indicator repeaters. As for the rear end, nothing really has changed except that the bottom section of the rear bumper has been blacked out, in

more bold and powerful.

The side mirrors have been redesigned, incorporating indicator repeaters. As for the rear end, nothing really has changed except that the bottom section of the rear bumper has been blacked out, in

hope of a sportier look.

Completing the package for the IS250 is the High Intensity Discharge (HID) headlamps, 16-spoke 17-inch alloy wheels and the tinted moon-roof.

The exterior package of

this car is simply gorgeous.

You can hardly fault its designers for anything as the design lines and stance of the car say it all.

Inside, everything looks well built, has all the convenience any of the others poss-

sess, and is a comfortable everyday car. It has a beautiful interior, with designers actually making the black interior look sporty.

The steering wheel, dashboard and console feel and look solid, exactly like a continental car. I find the three-spoke steering wheel and meter panel particularly attractive.

All the vital information in the panel is large enough while particular attention is given to the speedometer and tachometer.

With only the display and audio controls available on the steering wheel, the mainstay, which makes a presence, are the paddle shifters.

The silver trim treatment given to the centre console of the dashboard break the monotone shade. However, the let down is the air-conditioning and audio controls that are so large they look like they are meant for someone with serious eye problems.

And if you didn't notice the Japanese influence in the car previously, it would be the huge controls and buttons that would be the give away.

The materials used, from

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Make and Model: Lexus IS250
Luxury

Price: RM 395,000

Engine: 2,499cc, V6, DOHC,
Dual VVT-i

Max Power: 205hp @
6,400rpm

Max Torque: 252Nm @
4,800rpm

0-100kph: 8.4 seconds

Top Speed: 225kph

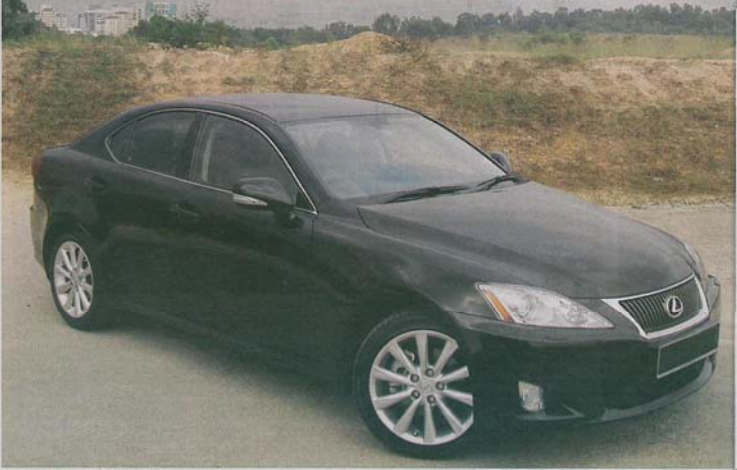
Transmission: 6-speed sequential, Super ECT with AI-shift paddle shifters

Suspensions: Double wishbone (front), multi-link (rear)

Brakes: ventilated discs (front), solid discs (rear)

Fuel Tank Capacity: 65 litres

Wheels and tyres: 16-spoke 8x17, 225/45 R17 (front); 245/45 R17 (rear)



the perforated leather seats to the ones used to make the dashboard, make the interior look and feel premium.

One of the special features in the Lexus, in all its vehicles these days, is the Mark Levinson audio system. Equipped with 14 speakers and a 6-disc in-dash changer, the entertainment experience in the IS250 is something to really enjoy.

The IS250 comes with a 2.5-litre V6 24-valve DOHC power plant that is good for a horsepower of 205bhp. Mated to it is Toyota's D4 direct injection technology that contributes to the better fuel consumption figure.

And thanks to the engine's 250Nm, the IS250 can hit 100kph in 8.4 seconds. A top speed of 225kph is claimed. A more comfortable cruising speed is also achieved at around 200kph.

Lexus, in keeping with the times, has thrown advanced technologies into the car like an Artificial Intelligence control programme and the Lexus Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management (VDIM). The power plant also has Toyota's Dual Variable Valve Timing-

intelligent (Dual VVT-i).

A 6-speed automatic gearbox with paddle shift controls is paired with this 4GR-FSE motor, which is not really great, but offers comfort and operates very smoothly.

The paddle shift control has a slight delay and because the engine sound can hardly be heard inside, it can be confusing as to whether the gears are actually changing. It does display the gears but doesn't do so until the revs hit its sweet spot.

As far as the driving is concerned, the IS250 isn't as firm as the 3-series or as soft and supple as the C-Class. It handles somewhere in between the two. And so, it is a comfortable car.

Try pushing it hard and it does not handle with precision as the steering wheel isn't crisp and precise. But it is this spongy feel that ensures a comfortable drive.

It understeers more willingly than anything else, which is safe considering most people aren't exactly skilful in correcting oversteer.

The brakes are good and this is no surprise especially when

a pair of 16-inch and 18-inch discs are fitted for the front and rear respectively. It also comes equipped with a brake fade compensation system.

Two versions are being offered in the Malaysian market; standard and Luxury, which is the car reviewed here. Some RM35,000 separates the two, mostly consisting of additional features. The Luxury is priced at RM305,000.

