

CR **RECOMMENDED** ✓**THE IS 250/IS 350 LINE****Body style** Sedan**Drive wheels** Rear or AWD**Trim lines** IS 250, IS 350**Engines & transmissions**

2.5-liter V6 (204 hp), 3.5-liter V6 (306 hp); 6-speed manual, 6-speed automatic

Base price range

\$29,990-\$35,440



Lexus IS 250

HIGHS | Braking, controls, fit and finish, quietness, turning circle, powertrain refinement, fuel economy, crash-test results.**LOWS** | Lacks a sporty feel, rear seat room, headlights, ride.

• **MANUAL OVERRIDE** The paddles (left) behind the steering wheel allow the driver to shift gears manually, but the response isn't particularly quick. The IS 250's center console (above) has an MP3 input jack.

The Lexus IS has a plusher interior and more relaxed manner than its predecessor. But the IS lacks the sporty feel of some cars in this segment and has a snug interior.

The interior uses high-quality materials, the cabin is hushed, and the engine is refined. Acceleration is quick, and fuel economy is commendable. However, the ride is stiff and the steering lacks feedback. Reliability is likely to be above average based on previous models. The IS earned a "Top Pick" from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety for exemplary crash protection.

THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The ride is stiff and feels jittery. Road noise is muted, and overall the interior is very quiet. The tight, 35-foot turning circle is impressive.

Handling is secure, with controlled body lean, but isn't especially agile. The steering is well-weighted but doesn't

convey a lot of feedback to the driver. The IS performed well in our avoidance maneuver, helped by tenacious tire grip and stability control.

The 204-hp, 2.5-liter V6 is smooth and responsive. It returned 24 mpg overall, but on premium fuel. A powerful 306-hp 3.5-liter V6 comes in the IS 350. The six-speed automatic is smooth and fairly responsive. A six-speed manual is available on the IS 250.

In wet and dry braking, the IS stopped in short distances. The low-beam halogen headlights didn't shine far enough

ahead and had a sharp beam cutoff. High beams had good distance and intensity.

INSIDE THE CABIN

The plush interior is very well-constructed. Most drivers found a comfortable position behind the tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, but head room was tight in the snug cockpit. Tall drivers had tight leg room in the narrow footwell. The short windows, wide roof pillars, and head restraints create some blind zones.

The front seat cushions feel soft but are supportive.

**TIGHT IN THE BACK**

Rear seat room in the Lexus is very tight, even with the front seats moved forward. Even preteenagers may want for space.

The seats are heated and cooled. The rear seating area is very cramped. Access to the front cabin is easy; rear access is more difficult.

The controls are straightforward and the dual-zone climate control works well. The key can be kept in your pocket or purse when unlocking and starting the IS.

Interior storage is limited. There's one small cup holder in the console, and another one is revealed by sliding back the center armrest. The trunk is relatively small, and the rear seat does not fold.

SAFETY NOTES

Knee air bags augment front, side, and side-curtain air bags. A precollision system is available with dynamic cruise control. The center-rear head restraint fails to provide good whiplash protection.

Driving with kids. Child safety seats proved to be difficult to secure in the center rear position.