

Lexus LS 400/430

In a meeting with top management, strategists, and engineers in August 1983, Toyota Motor Corporation Chairman, Eiji Toyoda posed a question to the group, “Can we create a luxury car to challenge the very best?” Their response was Lexus, starting with the LS 400 flagship sedan. From 1984-1988, the code name “F1” was used to refer to the new luxury model being designed. “F” for flagship and “1” for a sedan of the highest order. The designation LS 400 was revealed in November 1988 and stands for Luxury Sedan with a 4.0-liter engine. In its first month available to the public 3,439 units were sold outselling the Mercedes-Benz 300, 400 & 500 Series, S-class, 190, combined and the BMW 5,6, & 7 Series and 300 Series combined.

- **Designing the LS 400 required 450 running prototypes representing the work of 24 engineering teams, 1,400 engineers, 2,300 technicians, and 220 support workers.**
- **A 1990 *Consumer Reports* comparison test of LS 400, Infiniti Q45, BMW 535i, and Lincoln Continental noted, “LS 400 was simply the finest car the magazine has ever tested.”**
- **In 1990 the average LS 400 buyer had a median income of \$160,000, was college educated, with 70% having attended post-graduate school. One-fifth of the owners listed their job title as President/CEO.**

Toyota’s decision to enter the luxury market came as American buyers of its most popular vehicles were maturing and growing more affluent. Most upscale vehicles made by Toyota were not offered in the United States, and the top of the line Cressida could not compete with luxury European and American models.

Chief Engineer Shoji Jimbo and Ichiro Suzuki supervised the initial development of the LS. To better understand the needs and habits of the American luxury car market, Yuki Togo, President and Chief Executive Officer of TMS, USA urged Jimbo to lead a study team that traveled America, conducting focus groups and interviewing dealers. Another team moved from Japan to Laguna Beach, CA to explore affluent lifestyles.

To name its vehicles, Lexus decided to use an alphanumeric designation in the tradition of European luxury makers. This focused name recognition on the Lexus brand rather than the individual model, thereby avoiding the challenge faced by Honda’s Acura division, which was less well known than its flagship Legend sedan.





Lexus conducted 15 months of testing beginning in May 1986 on both the Autobahn in Germany and American roads. A year later, the final design of the F1 was approved on the ninth presentation to management, far more than was customary at the time for new Toyota models. In May of 1988, the first production LS 400 rolled off the line at the Tahara plant in Japan.

On September 1, 1989, the Lexus LS 400 (and ES 250) sedan went on sale at 65-70 Lexus dealerships across the country. Equipped with a 4.0-liter, four-cam, 32-valve aluminum V8 engine with 250 horsepower, the 1990 LS 400 also included a long list of luxury features.

LS 400 also introduced over 300 engineering and “design firsts” to the world including: a standard four-speed automatic transmission with its own computer that “talked” to the engine’s computer to ensure smooth shifting; a Traction Control System for better control on slippery roads; use of sound dampening material combined with engineering details to minimize NVH (Noise, Vibration, Harshness); and a tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel combined with driver’s side airbag.

At the end of the first year of sales, Lexus faced what could have been a major setback for the new nameplate. After limited complaints about cruise control malfunction and stoplight house distortion, Lexus decided to recall all 8,000 of the LS 400 sedans sold in 1989. Turning the recall into a Special Service Campaign, Lexus used the opportunity to establish itself as the industry leader in customer service. Dealers contacted LS owners personally, picked up the cars from homes, fixed the problems, and quickly returned the vehicles freshly washed with full tanks of gas and, in some cases, provided small gifts to make up for the inconvenience.

In 1991, Lexus became the No. 1 luxury import in the U.S. for the first time, topping Mercedes Benz and BMW with over 70,000 units sold. Fifty-two percent of Lexus sales that year were LS 400 sedan.

Another example of the attention Lexus pays to customers was the freshened 1992 LS 400, which contained more than 50 changes, many of which were in direct response to dealer and customer requests.

A second-generation, 1995 LS 400 went on sale in November 15, 1994 with no increase in price. The engine was redesigned to produce more power and torque with better fuel efficiency. The suspension was refined along with the steering, producing a more driver-oriented vehicle. The exterior and interior were also completely redesigned to create more legroom.

Accompanied by the national advertising theme “Imagine Driving It,” the all-new 2001 LS 430, the third generation of the LS sedan, went on sale on October 12, 2000. The change in name referred to the LS’s new 290 horsepower, 4.3-liter V8 engine. New luxury features included: a Mark Levinson premium audio system; a DVD-based navigation system; Intuitive Parking Assist; Climate Control Seats with heating and cooling along with power-heated rear seats with memory and massage; and a beverage cooler.



On January 8, 2006 at the North American International Auto Show, Lexus announced the fourth-generation of its flagship sedan. The 2007 LS 460 goes on sale in the fall of 2006. The all-new sedan features a 4.6-liter 380 horsepower, V8 engine with an eight-speed automatic transmission capable of going from zero-to-sixty in less than 5.5 seconds. The styling of the LS 460 reflects the brand’s new design philosophy, L-Finesse, which conveys simplicity and elegance with more emotional appeal.

New luxury features on the LS 460 include a heated steering wheel, and power closing rear doors and trunk. Active safety features like Electronically Controlled Brake (ECB) system, Electronic Power Steering (EPS), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Antilock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist (BA), and Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD) are coordinated by a Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management (VDIM) system.

For the first time in the 2007 model year, the LS line will expand to include long wheelbase version, LS 460L, which adds 4.8 inches to the wheelbase and overall length. A hybrid version of the LS 460 will debut in early 2007.

The LS has been one of the most lauded of all Toyota/Lexus models. It has won major awards for design, engineering, affordability, quality, and customer satisfaction every year since its introduction in 1989. Some of the highlights are:

- “Best Imported Car of the Year,” Motoring Press Association, February 1990
- “Best Luxury Car,” MotorWeek’s Driver’s Choice Awards, March 1990
- Most problem-free vehicle, J.D. Power and Associates Initial Quality Study (IQS), May 1992
- “Best of What’s New,” *Popular Science*, December 1994
- Most Appealing Luxury Car, J.D. Power and Associates APEAL Study, September 1998
- “2001 Design and Engineering Award,” *Popular Mechanics*, September 2000
- “2002 Prestige Luxury Car,” R.L. Polk & Co. Automotive Awards. January 2003
- “Best Overall Value” in Luxury Car Segment, IntelliChoice, February 2003