

## Lexus RX450h – a heavyweight hybrid - by Adri Bezuidenhout

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The motoring world is going the hybrid route and the latest example I spent some time with is the Lexus RX450h. Having driven two smaller hybrids – the Toyota Prius and the Honda Insight – recently, I had certain reservations whether such a big SUV weighing 2,2 tonnes would stand the test of practicality.

To explain the intricacies of the propulsion system of the RX450h will take up too much of your time. So I'll keep it short and sweet.

Under the bonnet is a 3,5-litre, 24-valve engine, V6 producing 183 kW and driving the front wheels. It is assisted by an AC electric motor developing 123 kW. Another electric motor, developing 50 kW, powers the rear wheels. In effect, this Lexus is front-wheel driven, until full acceleration is required when the rear wheels also come into play. Why this complex approach, you may wonder? It is to ensure performance at reduced fuel consumption and dirty emission levels.

So, you get in, press the start button and the instrument panel lights up, the driver's seat moves into position, the steering wheel tilts and then ... nothing happens. No sound or indication that the RX450h has come alive. A hesitant press on the accelerator pedal and it starts moving.



There isn't a rev counter as such. In its place is a dial divided into three sections; a blue line marked charge, a green line indicating economy and a white line marked power. You soon get the hang of it. Pull away gently and the needle creeps up to economy. Accelerate hard and it moves up to power. This is when the petrol engine is being fed by the fuel tank. Release the accelerator pedal and, on overrun, the needle drops to the charge section. This is when the batteries are being charged for the important role they play in the makeup of the Lexus RX450h hybrid.

Although easy to drive, you realise that this is a very sophisticated piece of equipment. It will take weeks, if not months, to understand and to get used to all the driving and in-car benefits the RX450h has to offer.

Looks wise, it is sleek, streamlined and stylish. It will find favour with the most critical eye.

Thanks to the ride height you slide into the comfortable cabin with ease and dignity and it is impossible to be uncomfortable in this Lexus. You can adjust or dial in any setting you require.

The seats, with under-bum blowers for hot or cold air, are well shaped and they hold their precious cargo in bags of luxury. The instrument panel and the dash are modern and stylish, while build quality is up there with the best.

The glass sliding roof – the Americans call it a moon roof – over the front seats is a big plus and there is more than enough legroom in the back.

The exterior mirrors are massive, but the one on the right tends to create blind spots for the driver while on the move.

The high-rise tailgate can be opened by means of a button on the dashboard and it closes with a press of a button on the tailgate itself. Rather handy.

The boot is deep but rather shallow and, thankfully, there is a proper spare wheel, not one of those run-flat gimmicks, unsuitable for travelling in South Africa.

Having lived with the Lexus RX450h for a couple of days, it is obvious that big hybrids deserve a place in the sun. To my mind, this is the ideal everyday means of transport.

