

2012 Lexus LFA

Forget every notion you ever had about Lexus and the LFA is the result, a street-able race car with seatbelt airbags rather than a roll cage and a 552-hp V10 wailing to 9000 rpm. The relentless pursuit of perfection has given way to the relentless pursuit of speed and the price is up by a factor of three.

Lexus will build 500 LFA sports cars at the rate of 20 per month, available to vetted drivers.

While many cars offer carbon fiber interior trim or add-on spoilers, the LFA's chassis and body are made of the stuff, like a racecar, and unfinished inside the hood and trunk to show it off. The expensive material allows for precise lines and edges, providing low drag (Cd 0.31) and high-speed stability in the same package. Weight is centered and low as possible, including the fuel tank, battery and windshield washer tank.

A compact 4.8-liter V10 engine in front, developed in conjunction with Yamaha and full of titanium and magnesium bits, is cast in the same foundry used by Toyota's Formula One team. An automated sequential six-speed gearbox in the back helps perfect weight distribution. Weight control, power and gear changes in a fraction of a second propel it the LFA from 0 to 60 mph in about 3.7 seconds and to a top speed of 202 mph.

Racing-grade components don't stop in the engine bay, with aluminum suspension bits, hollow antiroll bars, carbon ceramic brake rotors, forged aluminum BBS wheels, fat Bridgestones, and an active rear wing. Even the flat-bottom steering wheel uses carbon fiber to aid weight and balance.

The LFA cabin offers reasonable room and there's a smidgeon of luggage space. An LCD dash conveys engine and car data, offers various configurations and changes color as you pass redline to encourage an upshift (which it does automatically 200 rpm later). Pedals are floor-hinged aluminum; reverse is a button on the dash. It's not about Lexus silent luxury here, but there is a touch-controller much like that in the RX crossover.

LFAs will be built to order, with thousands of permutations among paint, leather, brake caliper and wheel colors; navigation, Mark Levinson sound system and Enform/Safety Connect telematics are by choice.

If that isn't enough, Lexus announced a Nurburgring package. The LFA was developed there. Each of the 50 cars with the Nurburgring package will have an additional 10 horsepower, a faster-shifting gearbox, a firmer suspension, exclusive black mesh wheels fitted with stickier tires, a larger front spoiler and a fixed rear wing. Changes like this typically equate to lower lap times, not straight-line speed.

The Nurburgring LFA will come in just four colors, including \$20,000 matte black that looks as dull as a stealth fighter, with carbon fiber console and door panels. It adds special privileges such as lodging, driving instruction, and an annual pass at the Nurburgring itself. Finally, it comes with a jacket to ensure you aren't mistaken for Ferrari tifosi since the Ferrari 599 is the LFA's logical competitor.