



LIFESTYLE

TIM BARNES-CLAY

Cars



TWIN TEST

Lexus NX300h & Skoda Octavia vRS

Lexus NX300h

The styling for Lexus' fresh model, the NX, perhaps owes more to race cars than slab-sided 4x4s – the type of motor sport utility vehicles (SUVs) are often based on. Indeed, the NX300h – a full hybrid – truly marks the company's entry into the mid-size luxury SUV

market. Its arrival is bound to attract a whole new bunch of drivers – and current Lexus lovers are guaranteed to become even more devoted to the marque.

The car's high-impact exterior presents a low, sloping roofline, a cab-forward silhouette, powerfully flared wheel arches and defining bodywork lines that flow directly

from the signature Lexus spindle grille.

Step inside and, true to its status as a practical SUV, the NX comes with a variety of storage points around the cabin. These include glove boxes, a console tray, cup holders and door pocket holders for half-litre bottles. Throughout there's fantastic attention to detail, →



“YOU CAN PROPEL THE NX300H FOR SHORT DISTANCES IN FULL ELECTRIC VEHICLE MODE WITH ZERO TAILPIPE EMISSIONS AND FUEL CONSUMPTION.”

as in the high-friction material used to line the inside of the cup holder that lets you open a twist-cap bottle one-handed.

The Lexus is stacked out with tech too, especially in the flagship (and most expensive), NX300h Premier supplied for this review. From phone charging to capturing an all-round view of your surroundings, the NX has features to make life on board easier.

Behind the wheel, the NX300h delivers an engaging and agile drive, as well as a superior level of ride comfort. Gadgetry labelled 'Drive Mode Select' enhances everything by allowing you to choose various driving styles. For example, it'll prioritise efficiency around town, or sharpen performance when negotiating the open road. Normal Eco and Sport modes can be selected simply by turning a dial on the centre console. Additionally, throttle response, suspension damping force and the level of steering power assistance can each be adjusted, according to the setting chosen.

Furthermore, as a full hybrid, you can propel the NX300h for short distances in full electric vehicle mode with zero tailpipe emissions and fuel consumption, activated by pressing a button located next to the Drive Mode Select dial.

FAST FACTS

Max speed:
112mph

0-62 mph:
9.2 secs

Combined mpg:
54.3

Engine:
2494cc 4 cylinders
16 valve

Max. power (bhp):
153 (engine) 141
(electric motor)

Max. torque (lb.ft):
151

CO2:
121g/km

Price:
£43,640





“THE OCTAVIA vRS IS TALENTED AT COVERING TARMAC QUICKLY.”

Skoda Octavia 2.0TSi 220PS vRS Hatchback

The spacious, reliable, Skoda Octavia has always been the most unrelentingly sensible of family cars. But add a ‘vRS’ badge to the rear and it undergoes a metamorphosis.

The 2.0 TSi turbo-engined Octavia vRS, on review here, produces 218bhp and 258lb/ft of torque. While identical to the closely associated VW Golf GTi, those figures are quite a way behind the Ford Focus ST and SEAT Leon Cupra.

Not that it’s a concern; 0-62mph in 6.8 seconds and a top speed of 154mph are rousing enough. And it’s a usefully lithe engine that can →







buzz along in a high gear, then produce brawny thrust without having to change down a cog or two.

So, as any good hot-hatch should be, the Octavia vRS is talented at covering tarmac quickly. Where some of its competitors feed back through the steering and chassis, the vRS doesn't communicate that much. But what it does declare is meaningful and said on cue. Add in solid stability and its unperturbed manner gives you confidence.

Around town, there's little extra weight in the steering than lesser Octavias, and even on low-profile 18-inchers, the ride is cool, calm and collected. Step on the gas and the turbo engine emits a pleasingly hard-edged snarl.

The fact the Octavia is one of the most popular taxi-cabs in the UK

FAST FACTS

Max speed:

154 mph

0-62 mph:

6.8 secs

Combined mpg:

45.6

Engine:

1984 cc 4 cylinder 16v turbocharged petrol

Max. power (bhp):

258

Max. torque (lb.ft):

151

CO2:

142 g/km

Price:

£23,755

"STEP ON THE GAS AND THE TURBO ENGINE EMITS A PLEASINGLY HARD-EDGED SNARL."

tells you all you need to know. Rear seat space betters many motors from the class above and the hatchback has a truly mammoth 590 litre boot.

It will also do 45.6mpg, though if that's not decent enough for you, you could always get the north of 60mpg oil-burner. And if you really need an even bigger boot, get the estate.

The vRS comes with Bluetooth, DAB radio, dual-zone aircon and rear parking sensors as standard. Spec-for-spec, the SEAT Leon Cupra is faster, but a couple of grand more expensive. The Volkswagen Golf

GTi offers a near-perfect blend of fun and practicality, for just over £2,000 more than the vRS.

There are plenty of good family cars that are rapid and fulfilling to drive. If you want those merits in a car that costs under £25,000, then the Skoda Octavia vRS unifies them better than any other motor. ■

Tim is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Tweet Tim Barnes-Clay @carwriteups www.carwriteups.co.uk

