



Lexus IS 300h

## Does a car project *an image*? Of course it does. It's just like that suit you wear to the office.

*We all like to give an impression, especially when it comes to business. In the corporate world, how you come across is vital if it means winning a contract or keeping the one you've got.*

Cars can play a significant role in our working lives. Flashy, sensible, different or bland, they potentially signal what the person behind the wheel might be like.

German automobiles tend to say you've done okay for yourself; so when you consider that the new IS 300h is pitched against BMWs and Audis, you might imagine Lexus has simply imitated the look of these ubiquitous but high status symbol motors. Well, I'm really pleased to report that the Japanese automaker has done a lot more than that.

On sale in the UK since July 2013, the IS 300h's sleek surfacing and tight, sporting proportions make the car stand out from, say, the BMW 3 Series or the Audi A4.

The range includes an F Sport model, on test here, which comes with sports-tuned suspension and electric power steering. Its design is even more toned and athletic than the standard model's features.

The cabin is clean and elegant, with an ergonomically ideal environment for when you're behind the wheel. High quality materials and finishes are used throughout the interior to convey a contemporary, premium appearance.

Many soft-touch areas have been created, including knee pads either side of the centre console. The IS F Sport's seats are even made using an integrated foaming method that ensures there are no gaps between the upholstery and the filling, giving both excellent comfort and great lateral holding.

But the latest IS does a lot more than look and feel good.

It's the first full hybrid version of Lexus's premium sports saloon and secures a combination of performance and efficiency. With low CO2 emissions, it delivers particularly attractive benefit-in-kind tax rates for company car drivers.

The vehicle runs using a fusion of pulling power. An electric motor produces 141bhp and a 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine delivers 178bhp. The rear wheels are driven through the hybrid power train's Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) – an automatic gearbox that provides smooth and seamless changes.

You can modify the 300h's performance by selecting from different drive modes: EV all-electric running, with the petrol engine switched off; Eco, for optimum fuel efficiency; Normal, and Sport, for sharper throttle response and a sportier steering setting.

Safety is top notch too. The IS 300h has been declared the best in its class by Euro NCAP. The saloon achieved the highest ratings in the 'large family' category in the organisation's 2013 safety performance testing programme, achieving the top five-star rating and an overall ninety-one per cent score.

So, image-wise, this particular Lexus radiates style blended with 'green' cool. It demonstrates you're successful and conscientious without being boring. The car's a gem and will stand out among the sea of German executive motors lined up in the parking spaces outside any corporate building.

Price: £33,495 on the road

By Tim Barnes-Clay

