

Bold Skin, Familiar Soul

Redesigned Lexus ES Hybrid Borrows EV Style, Keeps Its Calm

By Derek Price

CARGAZING.COM

Several people asked me the same question during my week with the 2026 Lexus ES. Is that thing electric?

It was a reasonable guess. It was also wrong.

My tester was the ES 350h, a gasoline hybrid that never needs to be plugged in. It just happens to look like it escaped from an EV show-car display, with a low, smooth nose, sharp creases down its sides and a thin light bar wrapped across the tail.

There's a reason for the confusion. This eighth-generation ES rides on a new platform designed for both hybrid and fully electric power, and Lexus sells battery-powered versions with the same body.

That's a bold move for this particular car.

For decades, the ES has been one of the most traditional sedans on the road. It looked conservative, drove softly and appealed to people who'd rather not be noticed. Giving it the full EV design treatment is like seeing your accountant show up in a racing suit.

I spent my first few miles worried Lexus had messed with the recipe.

It hasn't.

Underneath the flashy skin, this still drives like an ES. It's smooth, hushed and unbothered by rough pave-



The 2026 Lexus ES trades its conservative look for a sleek, EV-inspired shape with a low nose, sharp body creases and a wraparound taillight stretched across a noticeably longer body.

ment.

Acoustic glass and active noise cancellation help, and the new hybrid system leans harder on its electric motor so the engine stays quiet more of the time. The result is a car that lowers your pulse.

It pairs a 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine with a stronger electric motor for a combined 244 horsepower, up from 215 in the old ES 300h. Lexus estimates it will reach 60 mph in 7.3 seconds.

Nobody will call it fast. It just never feels strained, which suits this car better anyway.

Fuel economy is the big-

ger story. The front-drive ES 350h is rated at 48 mpg in the city and 44 on the highway. With a 14.5-gallon tank, that works out to more than 600 miles between fill-ups.

All-wheel drive is available on the ES hybrid for the first time, too, for \$1,400 more.

To me, this is the smartest part of the car. It gets the look, the screens and much of the around-town thrift of an EV, but I could drive it into another time zone without planning my day around a "fast" charger that isn't.

One caveat: Lexus recommends premium fuel, which takes a little shine off the

savings.

The cabin is exactly what ES buyers want. The car grew 6.5 inches in length, and the back seat now offers 40.7 inches of legroom. Adults can stretch out back there.

A 14-inch touchscreen anchors a clean, minimalist dashboard, another idea borrowed from electric cars. The materials still have that famously rich Lexus feel, with soft surfaces everywhere your hands land.

If I'm being very picky, though, the structure behind them doesn't feel quite as stout as before. The old ES felt like its trim was bolted

to a bank vault. This one feels a shade lighter in its bones.

My guess is that's what happens when engineers count every ounce in the name of efficiency. Most owners will never notice, but longtime ES fans might.

My favorite surprise was in back.

The trunk opening is wide and the load floor sits low, so packing it feels more like loading an SUV than a sedan. Lexus rates it at 13.3 cubic feet, which sounds ordinary on paper. In person, it looks enormous.

That matters more now that the LS flagship is down to a farewell Heritage Edition. I'm sad to see it go, but the ES is roomy, quiet and practical enough to soften the blow.

Pricing helps, too. The ES 350h Premium starts at \$51,095 with destination, and my tester came to \$53,190 with a driver-assistance package, cold-weather gear and premium paint.

A BMW 5 Series or Genesis G80 costs thousands more, and neither comes close to this fuel economy without a plug.

I wouldn't have predicted this twist in the ES story. A car this traditional wearing a suit this futuristic sounds like a mismatch.

After a week, I'm glad it's getting another generation. The look changed, but the calm feeling didn't.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT WAS TESTED?

2026 Lexus ES 350h Premium (\$49,700). Options: Convenience package (\$1,220), cold area package (\$375), premium paint (\$500). Price as tested (including \$1,395 destination charge): \$53,190

BY THE NUMBERS

Wheelbase: 116.1 in.
Length: 202.4 in.
Width: 75.6 in.
Height: 61.2 in.
Engine: 2.5-liter hybrid four-cylinder (244 combined hp)
Transmission: Continuously variable
MPG: 48 city, 44 highway

RATINGS

Style: 8
Performance: 7
Price: 8
Handling: 7
Ride: 9
Comfort: 9
Quality: 8
Overall: 8

WHY BUY IT?

The ES 350h is for buyers who want a quiet, roomy luxury sedan with electric-car style, 46-mpg efficiency and no charging stops on long trips.



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Inside, the ES pairs a 14-inch touchscreen and clean, minimalist dashboard with soft materials, a hushed ride and generous legroom in both rows.

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A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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