

CITY A.M.

BUSINESS WITH PERSONALITY

20 Lifestyle | Motors

WORDS BY
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A very grown up car indeed

With an interior like a luxury hotel, it's hard to relax in this beautiful but conservative new convertible

LIKE an ageing playboy, this Lexus has a handsome face, but is let down somewhat by its rather bloated rear end, inflated no doubt by the installation of its excellent folding tin top roof. Maybe an ageing playboy is the target buyer for the IS250C.

Not me then. Yet there's no doubt that the inside of this 250C, lined as it was in cream leather and soft pale carpet, was a pleasant experience. It may simply be the highest quality interior I've tried in this class of car. But as a day-to-day set of wheels, it's no place for kids or dogs or unwashed friends. We don't have a dog, nor do we ever get round to going for long weekend rambles in the countryside like we know we should, but after a week the inside of the car looked like we'd been playing football in it. It's a bit like being in a posh hotel - it feels fabulous but maybe Lexus should also provide complimentary slippers - I felt bad just keeping my shoes on.

In the back it's cosy, to say the least. It's a 2+2 convertible, so you can really only host an adult in the back if they sit behind the passenger seat or if the driver is very short. After finally working out how to power the seat forward, it took a series of fairly advanced yogic manoeuvres for my passenger to fold herself into the back. Then you wait for what seems an immeasurably long time for the seat to power itself back again before hopping in the car and desperately



grabbing at the seatbelt from its annoyingly distant resting place somewhere back near the rear screen.

Still, once you're finally all shoe-horned into the car it is quite a cossetting experience. Though if you thought entering the car was slow, driving it is similar. But, as befits the interior trim, the driving is refined. It's a relaxing affair, with no road noise to speak of. My advice: stick Puccini on the Mark Levinson audio and take it easy because this is not a car that is going to excite you much in terms of its performance. It's got a 205bhp V6 2.5 litre engine that looks exciting enough on paper, but in reality it's a bit slow.

But then maybe the car isn't geared towards people who aren't like we were, in a tearing hurry to get to Cornwall for a weekend of surfing. Perhaps they'd rather enjoy the luxury of taking time for their journey using the

car's impressive Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) system. With cruise control on, the car will brake itself if you're getting too close to the car in front - it uses a radar system - and if it really has to brake it bleeps at you, presumably to wake you up should you have dozed off, or maybe just to remonstrate at how rubbish your driving is. It's like having an electronic equivalent of the braking-distance chevrons they paint on the motorway. So if you're momentarily distracted you won't mindlessly and needlessly plough into the back of the car in front. In fact, there's quite an array of electronics. Front and rear parking sensors are helpful as visibility out of the back - or "car TV" to your rear-facing infant - is pretty poor. It was also hard to see out of the windscreen when it got chilly, thanks to an over-complicated climate control system.

The boot - lined in lamb-coloured carpet - offers a surprising amount of space for all the gubbins you'd need for a week's holiday. You could feasibly fit a set of golf clubs, two overnight bags, and even a tent in here, in the event that as the owner of a £40K+ car you'd not rather spend the night in a haven recommended by Mr & Mrs Smith.

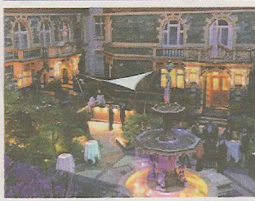
THE FACTS: LEXUS IS250C

PRICE: £44,520 (including options)
0-62MPH: 9secs
TOP SPEED: 130mph
CO2 G/KM: 219g/km
MPG COMBINED: 30.4mpg

THE VERDICT:

DESIGN: ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE: ★★★★★
PRACTICALITY: ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY: ★★★★★

OUT OF OFFICE ZOE STRIMPEL



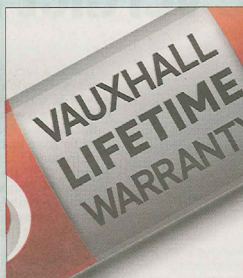
The famous courtyard at 51 Buckingham Gate.

OPERA AND DINNER UNDER THE STARS

Dining outdoors in a frescoed courtyard while being entertained with soaring opera is pretty much a win-win plan for an evening, right? If you agree, then nab the chance to experience a night of opera and dinner under the stars at 51 Buckingham Gate, the private Taj residences in St James's. A three course dinner (we had a sensational lamb) is interspersed with songs and entertainment from the excellent Covent Garden Strings Company. 20 and 21 Aug. From £60 at 51 Buckingham Gate, SW1E 6AF, tel: 020 7769 7766.

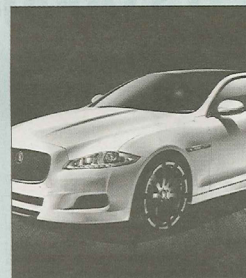
CAR TALK

BY RYAN BORROFF



VAUXHALL NEW WARRANTY

Vauxhall has announced a new lifetime warranty on all its new cars, trumping Kia which offered the best warranty up until now. The Vauxhall Lifetime Warranty applies to the first owner of any Vauxhall car and covers powertrain, steering and brake systems as well as electrical equipment. The warranty lasts throughout the life of the vehicle up to a limit of 100,000 miles. Now that's putting money where your mouth is.



JAGUAR GOES PEARLY

As part of its 75th anniversary celebrations, Jaguar has designed its XJ75 Platinum Concept, a one-off Jaguar XJ in pearlescent white and black paint, chrome and massive 22-inch wheels. The Jag has lower sills all around, a 1,200-watt Bowers & Wilkins surround sound system and even a bespoke clock designed by the Bremont Watch Company. Power comes from its 5.0-litre Supercharged V8 with 470hp.



The facts:
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The figures:
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