



SHORT TAKE

# Lexus IS300 SportCross

If it looks like a station wagon, you just don't get it.

BY PATRICK BEDARD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON KILEY

load floor, and you'll see hidden compartments of varying sizes down in what amounts to a basement. Surprise! There's even a round, basin-shaped receptacle just perfect for an angel-food birthday cake, with candles already installed and awaiting ignition.

All the normal station-wagon tricks are present here, although on a small scale. What can you expect from a car three inches shorter than a Corvette? The rear seats fold flat, leading back to a small ramp in the floor down to the load area behind. The front-passenger bucket folds forward, making a table of at least theoretical value. The greatest benefit of tabling the seat may be that it opens a space for long objects, all the way from the tailgate to the dash. Say your nine-foot boa locks into the unconstricted position and you need to schlep him off to the chiropractor. Just poke him in through the tailgate. If you need a fraction more, uh, headroom, pop the glove-box door.

Mechanically, the SportCross is little changed from the sedan. Same silky 215-hp in-line six up front, same five-speed automatic with the shifter buttons on the steering-wheel spokes (no manual in the wagon), same lean padding on the snug-fitting buckets. On the go, wind roars a bit around the posts of this squarish windshield shape. Ride motions are crispy, or sporty, if you prefer. This is a spunky, nimble machine.

Lexus admits to 125 pounds gained in the transformation to wagon. Length increases less than a half-inch, aero drag increases to 0.31 from 0.29, and occupant space both front and back changes not at all.

Still, there is that *special-car* flavor. Where the four-door has 7.0-inch rims all around, the SportCross has 7.5s in back with one-size-up 225/45ZR-17 tires. Very unwagonlike, that arrangement. A different car we drove had shiny gray "graphite polished" alloy wheels (\$400), giving a look of exotic metallurgy.



Readers of continuing immersion in this journal over the past 40-some years will say, "Yup, that's what it is, all right," when we describe this Lexus as a "shooting brake." Affluent Brits of yore occasionally had a sporting coupe, something from Aston maybe, cut and welded into a wagonlike conveyance for those afternoons of grousing around with the pointers and the Purdys. Or pheasanting around.

At least that's the way American scribes portrayed the cars. Slaves to accuracy will note that British writers use "shooting brake" pretty much synonymously with station wagon.

Anyway, this IS300 SportCross is a shooting brake of the fabled sort, a quick and rakish-looking run-about with moves remarkably like those of the zingy sedan from which it's derived, and with minimal concessions for hauling kids and hounds and large-screen TVs. That nails the legend dead-on because the "brakes" of those old pages were *carrozzeria* creations meticulously trimmed in luggage leather. No muddy boots allowed! These were *special cars*. That's the only reason we cared about them.

The SportCross plays the *special-car* role so convincingly it should be an Oscar nominee. No one serious about creating a hauler would taper the roof so low and narrow in back, or fill the wheel openings out flush to the flanks with 45-series neck-wrecker tires, or tuck and fold the fine-grain, cut-pile carpeting so painstakingly around the load area. The details are gorgeous, from the subtly contrasting *café au lait* piping on the vanilla leather seats to the lustrous metal grip on the smooth-pulling blind that unrolls to cover your cargo. Where to pack madame's backup Rolex and pearls? No problem. Lift a hinged panel in the

Unwagonlike, too, is the effortless closing of the tailgate, and the remarkable illumination of the HID headlights on a dark country road.

Decades ago, everybody knew a "brake" was special, according to those old pages at least. Would anyone get it today? At, say, the Home Depot's loading zone? Three men with orange aprons gathered when the mid-40s housewife pulled up for her potting soil and softener salt. They gave it the slow walk-around. One ventured a sticker price of \$60,000 at least. And the youngest one asked what *she* was doing on the weekend.

For the record, she denied giving out *those* signals, so it must be the car. ●

**Vehicle type:** front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 5-door wagon

**Price as tested:** \$33,924 (base price: \$31,350)

**Engine type:** DOHC 24-valve 6-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, Toyota engine-control system with port fuel injection

Displacement	.....	183 cu in, 2997cc
Power (SAE net)	.....	215 bhp @ 5800 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	.....	218 lb-ft @ 3800 rpm
Transmission	.....	5-speed automatic with lockup torque converter
Wheelbase	.....	105.1 in
Length	.....	177.0 in
Curb weight	.....	3536 lb
Zero to 60 mph	.....	.77 sec
Zero to 100 mph	.....	.20.3 sec
Street start, 5-60 mph	.....	.80 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	.....	15.8 sec @ 89 mph
Top speed (drag limited)	.....	140 mph
Braking, 70-0 mph	.....	.167 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad	.....	.0.82 g
EPA fuel economy, city driving	.....	18 mpg
C/D-observed fuel economy	.....	19 mpg

Note: Our test car was fitted with the standard 17-inch wheels; the photo car wore the no-cost optional 16-inch wheels.