



Lexus GX

Road test

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Tested model: 2004 4-door SUV 4WD, 4.7-liter V8, 5-speed automatic

Tested tires: Bridgestone Dueler H/T B40, size P265/65R17 110S

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► **Highs:** Powertrain, quietness, fit and finish, off-road ability, offset crash test.

► **Lows:** Agility, small third-row seat, fuel economy.

The Lexus GX470 combines a comfortable, luxurious interior and capable off-road performance. We liked the quiet interior, excellent fit and finish, and smooth, quiet powertrain. But agility and handling are not its forte, and the ride is unsettled. The third-row seat is small, and, when folded, takes up cargo space and reduces visibility.

THE DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The GX470 provides a comfortable, compliant ride. Impacts were well-muted, but uneven pavement can cause a side-to-side movement. The cabin is very quiet. Body lean was pronounced in our vehicle, but this is reduced by an option called KDSS (Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System). Steering is light and doesn't provide much feedback. The GX felt imprecise in corners during our handling tests, but the stability-control system kicked in early to keep it under control. The GX was secure in our avoidance maneuver, despite occasionally lifting its front wheel slightly. The refined 4.7-liter V8 provides smooth, responsive performance. The five-speed automatic transmission shifts smoothly. Off-road performance is excellent in part because of an electronic downhill and uphill assist. Expect 15 mpg overall. Braking performance was very good. Low- and high-beam headlight illumination was very good in distance and intensity.

INSIDE THE CABIN

The interior features impeccable fit and finish. Drivers sit up high, with a very good view out over the power-tilt/telescopic steering wheel. Comfortable, well-shaped seats have power adjustments, with power lumbar on the driver's seat. Some testers found the cushions a bit soft and periodically needed to adjust the seat to compensate for the collapsed padding. The second-row seats are comfortable and roomy, but some people may want more thigh support. The third-row seat is tight and uncomfortable, making it suitable only for children. Front- and second-row access is easy, but it takes dexterity to climb in the third-row seat. The illuminated gauges are easy to read. Controls are generally intuitive to use. The GX470 has a variety of storage locations. There are at least two sturdy cup holders for each row of seats. To get the maximum cargo volume, the second-row seats can be tumbled forward, and the third-

row seats folded against the sides or removed.

SAFETY NOTES

Side-impact air bags housed in the front seatbacks and curtain-style head-protection air bags are standard in the GX470. The curtain air bags extend to protect first- and second-row occupants in side impacts or rollover type incidents. Both front air bags have sensors to determine the severity of a crash and inflate accordingly. To avoid unnecessary air bag replacement, the front passenger air bags will not activate if the seat is unoccupied. These air bags supplement the required front air bags and front seatbelts equipped with adjustable upper anchors for improved fit and pretensioners and force-limiters to reduce belt slack and forces in the event of a crash. All rear passengers have three-point seatbelts and the outboard second-row belts also have adjustable upper anchors. There are adjustable, locking head restraints in all of the eight seating positions, but the third row and center second-row versions are not tall enough when lowered to adequately reduce rearward head travel in a rear impact. Daytime running lights are standard. Driving with kids: The third-row seat of the GX470 may not prove a good spot for installing rear-facing child seats, as they are subject to tilt in the outboard seats and are difficult to secure in the center due to the narrow belt spacing. Front-facing seats should prove secure there, but there are no top tether strap attachment anchors for that row. Rear-facing seats should be secure in the second-row outboard seats, but may not be secure in the center due to the narrow belt spacing. Front-facing seats should prove secure in the second-row. There are anchors for top tether straps for each of the second-row seats on the seatbacks as well as two sets of lower LATCH anchors. One LATCH attachment is in the right second-row seat and the second is offset between the center and left seating positions preventing use of the left-side seat when a LATCH equipped child seat is installed there. The LATCH anchors are relatively easy to access in slots in the seat cushion.

RELIABILITY

We expect reliability to be better than average, according to our latest subscriber survey.

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