

Why go for good or better when the best is possible?

Lexus just moved the goal posts with a car that leaves an indelible impression on all your senses.

Words RICHARD WEBB

ONE OF MY FAVOURITE AUTHORS, C.S. Lewis said of superlatives, 'Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say infinitely when you mean very; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something truly infinite.'

The time for the infinite may not yet be upon us, but Lexus has just delivered the strongest evidence yet of their new level of design and engineering ingenuity: the 2018 LC 500. But first, some context before dusting off any superlatives.

Concept cars are often jaw-dropping in design; after all, they are meant to embody the formidable creative and

engineering potential of carmakers. But the transition from motor-show icon to the dealership forecourt often causes them to become watered down, which can be disheartening.

This makes the new LC 500 all the more captivating because it's just about indistinguishable from the brave LF-LC concept car that was revealed in 2012. The design language is dramatic, and points to Lexus' determined efforts to shake off any traces of the previously staid or predictable. The car seems to define what the brand intends to be, and it's clear it's headed in the right direction.

Remember the last Lexus supercar, the LF? It was an astonishing beast of a car but it was hard to imagine how its carbon-fibre tub or 9 000 rpm wailing V-10 engine was going to trickle down to mainstream Lexus models. Well, now we know. With the LC 500, the trickle has become a torrent.

Some will call it a 2+2 sports car, but it's more of a grand touring coupé with a predilection for serious high-performance. Make no mistake, this is Lexus' new pole-position sitter and will surely influence the future line-up in ways that will win many conquest sales on its design alone.

Lexus' radical design language is instantly recognisable and unique, and more likely than ever to stir emotions than the many familiar and similar 'me too' brands available today.

But it's in the white-hot battle with an elite class of international grand touring coupés that the car is pitched. It has to be taken seriously by those who buy cars for the driving experience, and not just for its kerbside appeal – there would need to be real substance in the overall package.

A good place to start is the chassis that underpins it all. It's all new and doesn't share components or design ideology with any of the current Lexus stable, but will serve as the blueprint for the brand's future front-engine, rear-drive cars. Chief engineer Koji Sato said that the goal was to 'make the dynamic feedback clear, and our team spent

more than triple the usual amount of time perfecting the LC 500's road feel'. Locally, the LC 500 is launching with its tested 5.0-litre naturally aspirated V-8, punching out 351kW, and mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission for a linear throttle response. And oh, the sound! This thing howls – a vocal bellow unfettered by any turbocharger's plumbing.

Inside, the cabin has an air of high-level, opulent material richness and styling flourishes that distinguish the LC 500 from its antagonists every bit as convincingly as the exterior does. The result is an amazing experience where traditional Takumi craftsmanship fuses with modern technologies.

They're seemingly contradictory but these paradoxes make it truly cutting edge – it's aesthetically precise and feels pleasing

to the touch – and is a genuinely moving experience. Put simply, it makes you want to drive, but I mean *really* drive.

With this elegant and exclusive car, Lexus is convincing people to look afresh at a brand they may previously have overlooked. This isn't simply a car that looks terrific – it has been engineered through every layer to deliver a very special driving experience. It is ambition made real – evidence of an established maturity, passion and engineering for all to see.

The LC 500 is a grand touring coupé that says, 'We have arrived!' That's a remarkable achievement for a brand that's been around for less than 30 years. I wonder what C.S. Lewis would have made of it? Last word goes to him, then: 'There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind.' □