



## Chauffeur-First Introduces Lexus Hybrids At The Top End

1 June 2007

The first major executive chauffeur fleet in the UK to switch its cars to hybrid power – that's the claim of Chauffeur-First. The London-based company says it's the emergence of Lexus Hybrid Drive technology and the readiness of its customers to think green that has enabled it to start transforming its operations.

Chauffeur-First has already taken on 18 Lexus GS 450h performance saloons, all top-of-the-range SE-L models, with two of the new LS 600h luxury saloons due for delivery and a further five GS 450h. The company hopes to order another 20 Lexus hybrid cars before the end of the year. Its existing 62-vehicle fleet includes BMW, Mercedes and Audi executive models, as well as conventionally powered Lexus GS 300s. Chauffeur-First intends to phase these out and replace them with Lexus hybrids, retaining only a contingent of Chrysler Grand Voyager MPVs for use when extra capacity is required.

Based in Limehouse, Chauffeur-First is one of the fastest-growing companies at the top end of the executive car business, with 60% of its work made up of airport runs and inter-city transfers, and the rest transport around London. "Other chauffeur hire companies have been introducing the Toyota Prius, but as far as we know nobody has yet addressed the executive market in this way," says Chauffeur-First's Sales Director Alex Bell. "We're excited about it, and our customers think it's wonderful. That's because every company has been coming out with carbon-neutrality statements, yet ground transportation has remained a problem for them.

"The Lexus cars are very stylish and sleek, and passengers think they're fantastic. They also appreciate their quietness – they can be picked up at 5am to go to the airport and the family will sleep through their departure! The chauffeurs really like them too, especially considering the cars they're moving from," says Mr Bell. "The Lexus have every conceivable extra, but supplied as standard. Driving them is very easy and relaxing, and they're responsive cars. The power is there but they're so economical – we're getting on average 40 mpg, with the best results on city streets. And because of the electronic-controlled Continuous Variable Transmission, the ride is as smooth as you could ever imagine. It's as if there are no gear changes at all!"

The high-performance Lexus GS 450h's 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine and high-output electric motor give it a top speed of 155mph and 0-62mph acceleration in 5.9sec, but with combined-circuit CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of only 186g/km.

The LS 600h luxury saloon on sale in the autumn, has a 5.0-litre V8 petrol engine and electric motor with output of 443bhp, yet official combined-circuit fuel consumption is almost 30mpg and CO<sub>2</sub>

emissions under 220g/km.

Alex Bell also singled out the Lexus satellite navigation system for praise. "Our chauffeurs know London like the back of their hands, but this satnav is not only far more accurate than any other system I've come across, it's especially good at giving early warning of traffic hotspots."

Chauffeur-First is contract-hiring its cars through Lexus Financial Services, and they are supplied and maintained by business centre Lexus Woodford. The vehicles will be replaced on an 18-monthly/60,000-mile basis.

"Executives have traditionally been driven around in black cabs and gas-guzzling cars," says Alex Bell. "Lexus has invested millions of pounds over a number of years in finding the solution, so either other manufacturers must now buy in its technology or waste millions reinventing the wheel. "I think it will be three or four years before anyone else comes close to the standard of Lexus."

**ENDS**

For more information about Chauffeur-First, contact Alex Bell on 020 7791 3612