

LOTUS LETTER

Special Supplement
Spring 2007



2006

My First Year With My Elise



Chris Marson
2006 Lotus Elise
Solar Yellow

My First Year With My Elise

In a word, it has been fantastic. I have put over 11,000 km on in one year. That is equal to almost four years of driving with our Seven and I still couldn't get enough of driving it. But I am jumping ahead.

For the first 10 years that we owned our Seven I thought I would be buried in that car (not that I drove it crazily, had a death wish or had an incurable disease but that I already had perfection and nothing could ever replace it).

We had ordered our BRG SuperSprint 1700 Caterham in January of 1987. It arrived in late summer in two large boxes. Look at silly person driving boxes in photo. I had built the car over the space of two weekends, with a little help from my brother Kevin and my wife Irene. Well, maybe a lot of help from Kevin and Irene did read the instructions and later the newspaper as it seemed to have more relevance at times. I still



remember the serial number: 5LC469817LD (of course, I still remember the serial number of my first Lotus, a red 1973 Elan Plus 2/130 – 50/0086N). Shades of the Number 6 when he “escapes” in the episode “Many Happy Returns” to find an unknown woman in his flat and with his Seven and says “I know

every nut and bolt and cog--I built it with my own hands” Yet in 1996 when I first saw photographs in a magazine of a red Elise I thought to myself that here was a new Lotus that could possibly replace my Seven with (I find the Espirits too big and bulky for my tastes). All of the reviewers raved and drooled over the car. It was in 1999 when we were visiting



Belgium while we lived in France that I saw my first Elise “in the flesh”. It was BRG and looked fabulous parked beside the medieval church. But the chances of this marvel ending up in North America, especially powered with a Rover powerplant seemed pretty remote. I continued to enjoy my Seven for many years and kilometres and tried to put the Elise out of my mind.

Then rumours began, quietly at first but with increasing frequency and certainty. It looked like the Elise might possibly get into the United States. Finally, in 2004 after much drama, the 2005 model year Lotus Elise Federal edition actually arrived in America. But all inquiries regarding availability in Canada were met with “not likely” and “too small a market” and “dunno”. When a 2005 US spec orange Elise S2 showed up at the 2004 Bronte Creek British Car Day, it took me all of 2 minutes to talk my way into sitting in it. I was hooked at this point. I mean with a powerful, high-revving, bullet-proof Toyota engine how could you go wrong! Even in an outrageous “chrome orange” colour (sorry Ivan) it still looked great. For the next year, I phoned the three Canadian

dealers (Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal) and began checking their websites monthly in the hope that information on whether the car would be allowed into Canada was available. The dealer in Vancouver seemed to know the most but there were many unknowns. There were encouraging signs too. The dealer's staff had all gone to Georgia to test the cars and the mechanics had been trained in maintenance. By the 2005 Bronte Creek British Car Day, it seemed almost certain that the Elise would be available in Canada soon but it had not been officially confirmed. I made up a small "For Sale" sign for the Seven with a photo of the car and put it on the windscreen of the car on British Car Day. I had about a dozen people talk to me seriously enough to take one of the "For Sale" signs. I warned everyone who was interested that the car was for sale only if I was able to buy an Elise, that is, if it was allowed into the country. On the basis of the interest generated, I decided that we could risk ordering an Elise if and when it became available, as it seemed certain that I could sell the Seven which would fund approximately half of the purchase price of the Elise.

Then, almost immediately, Good News!! The Elise was available. The Toronto dealer, John Simoes of Gentry Lane, said that while quantities of the car were very limited and while there were a lot of people on the waiting list, many wanted to actually see and/or drive the car before committing but if I put money down (\$5,000) NOW there was one available for order. I phoned Irene and obtained the final OK, excused myself from work and went down to place our order. It was exciting. The Canadian prices were not fully known at that time. In typical Lotus fashion, John had been contacted by Lotus who told him that all was go with the cars but

that he needed to send the specs for his first shipment of seven cars IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS!! The next three batches of seven cars were custom ordered by their new to-be owners. Our choice, the Solar Yellow with the touring package and the 3M Starshield, was number 31 on the list. It was not certain any more 2006's would available to Toronto after the five shipments of seven. Cars were to start arriving in November with batches arriving every three weeks. That would place mine in early spring. Perfect. I went to the licence bureau and ordered a set of vanity plates "ELISE S2". Even more perfect.



Two private American 2005 Elises were driven up from Georgia so they could be on display at the dealer for two weeks. The whole family went down to see what I had put us in debt for and what we were giving up our wonderful Seven up for. We had owned the Seven for 18 years (Irene was barely pregnant with our eldest son Colin when we received our Seven). Irene and my daughter Gillian had seen countless pictures of the Elise and had heard endless minutiae regarding the Elise. Now they indulged me while I raved again about more minutiae about differences between these 2005's and our superior 2006's. [Note to the owner of one of the Georgia cars, I sincerely apologize for the actions of

my daughter. When she was sitting in the car she changed all of the radio presets to her favourite radio station - CHUM-FM.]

Within days of placing my order on the Elise, I had a call from one of the gentlemen (also named Chris) who spoke to me at Bronte. He came to our house one dark night and test drove the car with me. It was spitting with rain so this was his chance to experience the car under unpleasant conditions. Before I knew it, our Seven was sold. We drove it to his house on the weekend with Irene leading the way in her car using my unfamiliar GPS. I followed in the Seven lost in my thoughts of selling the car. Unknown to me she drove right past the turnoff. I thought that it seemed like a long way but not having a map, I blindly followed. When the road came to a dead end I figured something was wrong. We turned around and found the correct turn-off. The garage door of the new owner's house was open and lights were on. He seemed so happy. I knew it had gone to a good new home, but I was Lotus-less.



I had had this feeling before when eighteen years earlier I had sold my Plus 2 that I had owned for over a dozen years. I had forgotten what this hollow feeling was like. I would go into the garage and it was ... empty.

Canadian prices had been leaked and were posted on the Californian Golden Gate Lotus Club site. The BC Lotus dealer (Weissach Performance in Vancouver) used these prices on their

web site. They had a really nice page that allowed you to see the car in various colours and spec out the options that you were interested in. The prices were withdrawn within a day once Lotus told them the prices were not finalized yet.

The allotment of 2006 Canadian cars (somewhere around 150 Elises) was divided between the three Lotus dealers based on their previous performance in selling Espirits. This meant Vancouver got the most, followed by Montreal. Toronto got the least. The 2006 year model cars had several small changes over the 2005's:



really bright LED rear running, turn and brake lights and daylight running lights were now standard, new traction control options, throttle by wire and a limited slip differential. The colour line-up had almost been revised. Now there were two standard non-metallic colours (red and BRG), ten metallic colours (extra \$) and eight "Lifestyle" colours (extra, extra \$). How many cars today

come in 20 choices of colour? Usually you get a choice of silver, grey, titanium, gold, bronze or graphite which all look the same.

The cars were to arrive by boat to Toronto and clear customs. Cars were then to be shipped by truck back to Montreal and on to Vancouver.

Then Transport Canada struck a seemingly fatal blow, the cars were suddenly NOT acceptable. Lotus had received a verbal agreement but not the written documentation. Rumours flew thick and fast: the lights were too low, bumpers were not acceptable etc. This went on for months. What were we to do? We had sold our wonderful Seven and now had nothing. I began to avoid going into the garage, as it seemed emptier than ever.

Finally, the truth came out. Lotus had used a simple system for the mounting of the front turn sign light assembly that allowed it to be popped out readily with a long bladed screwdriver poked through the front grill to make changing its light bulb easy. However, in some minor accidents in the states, the entire front turn signal light assembly had popped out. New brackets had to be designed by Lotus - complete with elastic bands - to supplement the standard mounting. All of the Canadian cars were now held up in England awaiting a solution to this problem.

In February 2006 the first few Canadian Elises finally trickled into Toronto. I went, by myself this time, to drool on the first Torontonians 2006 Canadian Elises. The previous schedule of seven cars every few weeks went out the window with all the

delays. Cars seemed to be arriving in larger groups and more frequently.

I figured our car was still at least a month or more away when I phoned up John Simoes late in March to see what paperwork would be required. I was not sure how to use my vanity plates. He asked me again what my name was and said, "Hang on a sec. Yes, I just got an email an hour ago. Your car just cleared customs. It will be here tomorrow." Early! Hoping against hope I asked if the car could be ready on Friday. It was now Wednesday. To my surprise, he said, "Yes, around 2:00 in the afternoon". The blood pounded in my temples. I couldn't think clearly. I needed the small slip of paper that had come with my vanity plates, proof of insurance, driver's licence and oh yeah...a cheque. I remembered thinking the little slip of paper that came with my vanity plates was just a packing slip. I had thrown it out! I phoned MOT. I got the name and fax number of the person I needed to contact. I wrote the fax and sent it at about 7:10 am the next morning to MOT and asked if they could fax the required paper work to my office. When I arrived at my office 15 minutes later, I looked in the fax machine and there it was. Wow, I take back everything I have ever said about civil servants (especially since I am one now, temporarily). I arranged insurance and faxed everything to Gentry Lane.

Friday morning at work: I get very little done. I leave work before lunch. I go to Gentry Lane by bus and subway. I arrive early. John takes me into the large basement parking lot. I see our baby for the first time. Even in the basement under



fluorescent light the solar yellow looked great (I had never seen a real car in the colour before!) Just the final prep is left and mounting my vanity plates. In the shop, chrome orange is the most

popular colour. There are more Elises here than I ever thought I would ever see in one place – 3 chrome orange, 1 krypton green, one BRG and my solar yellow. Graham, the mechanic, is very friendly and takes the time to talk to me as he is working. With the car up on the hoist, the absolutely flat underside of the Elise can be seen. Aluminium panels must be removed to access the engine, the headlamp adjustments, the rear jacking point – just about anything.

Before you know it I am being taken outside to be shown how everything works. Being a previous Seven owner, the first thing I ask is “Can you show me how to take the top off?” It was about 10°C and not raining, perfect top down weather. The top is a breeze to put on and off. The soft top has large two metal side

rails, one above each window that bridges the gap between the integral roll bar and the windscreen frame. To take the top off, slide the two lever handles on the roof side rail towards each other. Roll the top towards the passenger side. Unlock the passenger side roof side rail and finish rolling up top. It takes longer to walk around the car to the other side. There are also two fibreglass reinforced plastic “sticks” providing support that readily pop in and out. They have arrows and are keyed so that they cannot be inserted backwards (I tried). There is a bag into which the top may be stowed which then fits into the boot. There are steel cables front and back of the top that drop into grooves along the top of the windscreen and roll bar to help seal out the water (see photo).



However, there is a warning label “The roof system and weather seals on this vehicle are shower resistant. In certain environmental conditions water may enter the cabin.” Obviously, there had been some complaints! I have subsequently been caught out in some pretty heavy downpours and have had no more than one or two drips getting over top of

the side windows. The large single wiper stays stuck to the windshield and clears the water off well.

Well the top was down and I was ready to go, or so I thought. However, the most complicated thing was learning how to start it. The red flashing LED in the tachometer tells you that the immobilizer is on. Press immobilizer button on the key fob and within 2 minutes insert the key with your right hand and turn it two clicks, depress the clutch and press the starter button with your left hand to start. Easy. Seems strange as the ignition switch used has a start position that is not connected. Marketing said people needed push button start. Just touching the button instantly starts the engine with no muss or fuss. Seemed strange at first – no choke, no stabbing the throttle to pump a cupful of gas into each carburettor. No backfiring or spitting back. (What about the squirrels, I thought?). A very civilized engine. There is a valet mode so that the valet doesn't have to use the immobilizer button but who is going to let a valet park their Elise?

I cautiously pull out onto Dupont Avenue being careful not to stall it. I had been warned that I HAD to keep the engine revs below 4,500 rpm for the first 1,600 km. Not an easy task in an engine that redlines at 8,000 rpm. It is made more difficult by a tachometer that displays 0 to 3,000 rpm in the space where a normal tachometer would have 0 to 1,000 rpm. It is then evenly spaced out to 9,000 rpm after that. So as you start to exceed 3,000 rpm, the angular rate of needle movement increases by a factor of 3 making it look like you are going to scream through the 4,500 rpm limit so readily. Lotus' onboard computer version of Big Brother keeps track of all you do: maximum revs, time spent at

various rev levels, even whether you did a 6,000 rpm drop-the-clutch launch start. According to the mechanic, Lotus lets you do four of these starts a year before possibly voiding the warranty. How did they arrive at four? I can honestly say I have never abused any car I have owned with such treatment.

By the time I was half way home my face was starting to hurt from grinning so much. I took some pictures of myself while I was driving and I did look happy. When I got home, Gillian wanted to go for a ride to wave at her friends so we drove around for a while. We were having so much fun we forgot her flute lesson and rushed home to see her teacher waiting in our driveway.



A week later, I had a day off and went to pick Gillian up from school. I arrived early and parked in the lot so that I had a clear view of the school doors. This car is a teenager magnet. There was no way I could move from the car. I would say that over 90% of the kids that talked to me knew what it was because of video

games. They would all say “I drive this car all the time!!!” I was still grinning all the time.

It took me two and a half long weeks to get the first 1,600 km on. I was starting to wonder how long my face could take all this grinning. People were avoiding me at work as most of the time I had a distant glazed grin on my face.

The Elise had a couple of minor problems. The headlights were lighting up the top of the trees. To aim the headlight, however, is no simple task. Maintenance on this car is best undertaken on a hoist that picks the car up by the wheels. Jacking points are marked on the underside of the car but to raise the whole car with jacks requires that the panel underneath the engine be removed first, revealing a third set of jacking points. Failure to use these jacking points has resulted in at least one car falling off the hoist at a tire shop. (Pictures posted on internet). It is possible to reach up and access the underside of the headlamp assembly only after removing a large alloy sheet at the front of the car. After undoing some Allen screws locked with a wingnut, the top clear plastic headlight cover may be removed allowing access to the aiming screws for the low and high beams. The high beam has the screws facing forward so they are easy to get at while the low beam has the screws facing backwards and really awkward to get at. Also the vertical and horizontal adjustments are not totally independent of each other making adjustments slow. The 2007's are much improved with plastic covers that are actually sealed to the lower part of the headlight assembly. Bulb replacement and headlamp aiming can now be accomplished from underneath the car.

I also had the driving lights installed. There is a new grill and a new panel in the dash that has the extra switch in it. The driving lights are only available when main beams are on. But since the daylight running lights are really the low beams at full power, flashing to pass or switching to high beams uses all 6 lights at once. This makes you REALLY visible. When I used the headlamp flash after someone cut me off, I could see the paint on his bumper start to bubble and peel from the heat. With the LED rear lights, LED sidelights near the fenders and side repeaters this makes the Elise one of the most visible Lotus in the dark.



In the end the only way I could get the lights aimed the way I liked was to do it myself. I drove up close to the garage door, marked the desired placement with masking tape and rolled the car back. Total time 90 minutes, with about half that spent fooling with the really hard to get at low beam adjustment screws. You need to be careful handling the under-car aluminium panels as the edges are sharp. Wear leather gloves.

The aluminium front licence plate holder is asymmetric and can be mounted either way up. The dealer mounted the plate as low as possible blocking the minimum amount of the radiator intake. A great idea but anything on the road taller than a matchbox caught the number plate. Removing the panel underneath the car



(same one as for headlamps.) gives you access to the four nuts that hold the plate holder on. I flipped the plate holder over and at least tripled the ground clearance - three matchboxes. But with two people in the car it dragged on every

driveway curb. So it was off to see Kevin. We cut the bottom tabs off and re-welded them back on top, drilled new bottom holes and now I could use driveways without fear of dragging.

The car is slow to warm up. Being minimalistic, there is no temperature gauge, per se. The instrument panel consists of a tachometer and a speedometer. Under the non-angularly linear tachometer is a small LCD panel. On the left, there is the odometer with a trip meter above it. On the right, on top, it a 6 segmented bar graph for the fuel. The smallish gas tank holds 10.6 US gallons (40 L - not much more than the Seven – 8 Cdn gallons – 36 L). However, due to the improved fuel economy of fuel injection, 40 year newer engine technology, and perhaps a

slight improvement in aerodynamics, range is over 150 km per tank more. There is a low fuel light when less than 5 L of fuel remain. Below the fuel graph, is a digital water temperature gauge. No digits are visible when the water temperature is below ~160°F. This is important as the engine management system limits engine revs to 6,000 rpm (below the powerband) until the temperature is displayed on the instrument panel. Oddly, water temperature is in degrees Fahrenheit with a metric display. There is a small multi-purpose switch in the steering column. With the ignition on, pressing this button for about a second resets the trip meter. Pressing and holding this button down for a few seconds, cycles through the levels of illumination of the instrument panel. Finally, if you have the ignition on with the driver's door open, pressing this same button will do a master reset of the speedo and tach needles in case they do not drop to zero.

There is a bevy of idiot lights below the speedometer, which is marked in km/h only. There are lights for turn indicator (single



light), seat belt, handbrake, low oil pressure, low gas, ABS, high beams, air bag, battery, traction control override and engine warning. The idiot lights had to be Canadianized as the symbols for handbrake and ABS brakes are different in the two countries. The red immobilizer LED in the tachometer also warns that the rev limit is approaching.

The Elise's speedometer is wayward. Back in the good old days of the 1960's and 1970's, it was not uncommon for speedometers to be inaccurate by more than 15% (some read high, some read low). As part of the review of a car both *Car and Driver* and *Road & Track* would test the accuracy of the speedometer. The Lotus Elan, Europa, Plus 2 etc always had super accurate speedometers (usually within 1%). The handling of the cars was accurate so why shouldn't the speedometer be accurate too? Nowadays all cars are so accurate that it is never even tested. Using my handheld GPS (+/- 0.1 km/h), our Honda and Acura are within the half of the thickness of the speedometer needle of being right on. The odometer on the Elise is right on but the speedometer reads about 9% high. Multiplying the revs by the speed in gears given in the back of the manual matches exactly with the GPS. I have found several other references on the Internet about inaccurate speedometers. According to the postings, it is a requirement in Europe that a speedometer never reads low and thus manufacturers make them read high so even if people fit other rims/tires they will not read low. The dealer here however, said they have had no other reports of low reading speedometers. Does this mean that no one else looks at his or her speedos? Perplexing.

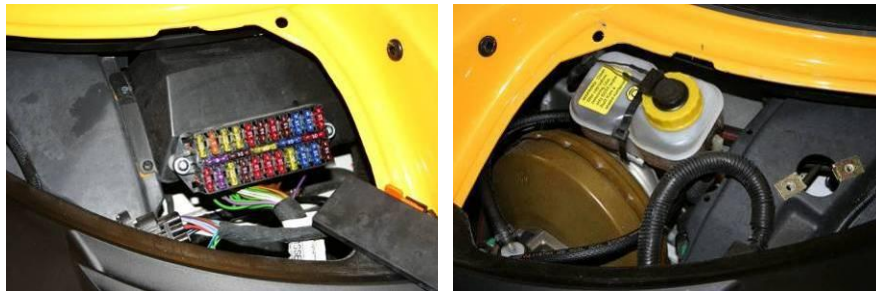
The Elise is all about air management. As mentioned, the underside of the car is completely flat. Twin rear air diffusers manage the air from under the car. The rear deck of the car acts as a wing to supply downforce. Air for the radiator enters through the nose and is exhausted upwards just in front of the windscreen.



There are twin oil coolers, one each side of the radiator intake. The warmed air from the air coolers is directed towards the front discs for cooling. Air for the engine compartment enters intakes located just behind the doors and through three small ducts on the underside of the car and exhausts through large louvers above the engine compartment. All of this air management ensures that the car has downforce.

With the radiator lying horizontally in the front of the car there is no storage compartment up front. There are two access panels just below the windshield that require an Allen key to open them. The driver side panel provides access to the common brake and

clutch master cylinder reservoir. According to the manual the windscreen washer fluid reservoir is supposed to be under here, (see opening in photo), but it is now relocated in the engine bay. The passenger side panel provides access to some of the fuses and relays (cover of fuse block in photo). Lots of fuses!



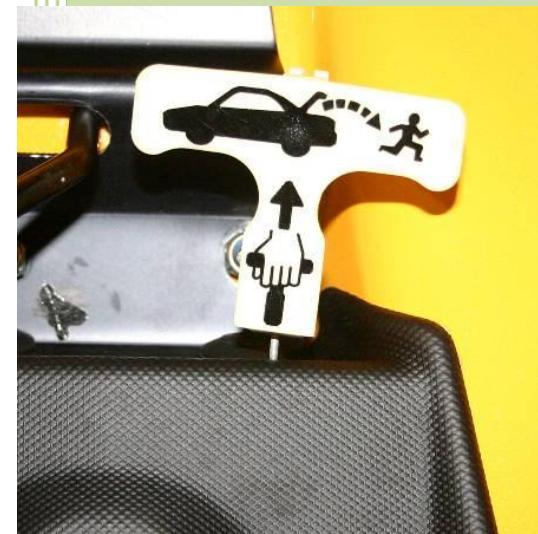
The supplied tools are minimal. There is a tool for undoing the large Torx screws that hold the wheels on, an Allen key for undoing the front access panels and a towing eye that fits in the radiator intake and attached onto the chassis. This is to be used when winching onto a flatbed car transporter. It doesn't exactly look like it is strong enough but I guess in an emergency it will do. You can see the hook in the photo of the modified number plate holder.

The brakes are conventional drilled and ventilated steel discs and boost assisted (for the ABS). The early Elises used a aluminium composite brake disc and special pads. The discs were supposed to last the life of the car with some of the pad transferring to the disc to protect it. The history books are not clear when Lotus

made the change to conventional discs. Imagine this, a handbrake that works on a Lotus!

The remote for the *Cobra* alarm system electrically locks the doors and arms the alarm system. The key can also be used to mechanically lock the doors but this is a different system and cannot disarm the alarm. Thus, if the doors are locked with the remote and the key, you need both to open the door again. Two minutes after the ignition key is removed, the immobilizer self activates. The engine will turn over but it won't start. The boot has no remote release and can only be opened with the key. This trips the alarm, if it is activated, as does removing one of the front access panels – talking from experience here. There is also a microwave emitter in the back firewall that senses if someone enters the passenger compartment without opening a door with the alarm still activated. The alarm has its own battery and will work even if the main battery is disconnected.

On the underside of the boot lid there is a large yellow T-shaped emergency release handle that is to be used by a child in case he/she is trapped in the rear



luggage compartment. I cannot fathom how a child who would be old enough to know how to use this release could possibly fit into the boot. To maximize the luggage space and keep weight down, there is no spare tire. There is a small bottle in the boot that contains a mixture of liquid latex and a propellant to re-inflate and seal small punctures. Oddly enough, there is no locking mechanism for the fuel filler cap.



Once inside the car, the interior is seen by some to be somewhat Spartan. Not as Spartan as a Seven but certainly less luxurious than my old Plus 2. My Plus 2 had gauges and switches all across the entire width of its wood dash. The Elise has only the

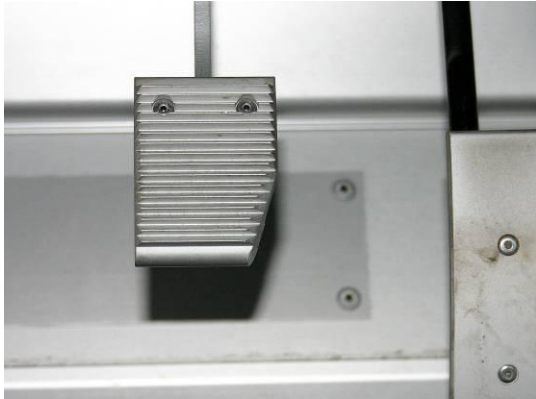


instruments in the cluster and the only switches are for the lights and the heating system. There is minimal carpeting in the car allowing the chassis to be seen. The Elise chassis is made from aluminium that is glued together. The wide sills maintain the torsional strength in an open car.

When you close the doors you can feel the solidness of the side intrusion bars in the doors. Opening the door reveals a large wonderful extruded hinge that looks very solid. In the earlier Elises, all of the pedals were made from the same extrusion, just cut in different widths. They were like pieces of art. There are pictures in several of the books showing Lotus employees with a brake pedal on their desk as a decoration. However, someone at Lotus found that, despite first instincts, steel pedals were lighter and cheaper than the alloy extrusions. The placement of the pedals is good



with a lot more room than a Seven pedal box. There is even a dead pedal! However, even with narrow shoes I was still occasionally getting the side of my right shoe caught on the brake pedal while operating the throttle. So it was off the Kevin's again. Using an air-powered cut off tool we trimmed off the corner of the



brake pedal. We wanted to trim the pedal in-place and now we know why there are holes in the aluminium divider. It is so you can feed the air tool hose through it! We polished the edges and I haven't caught the edge of my

shoe since.

But what about driving the darn thing? It is the best handling car I have ever driven. The engine pulls cleanly from low revs and starts feeling strong at about 4,500 rpm. As you reach 6,200 rpm there is a very noticeable step change as the second cam comes into effect. There is a distinct exhaust note change and it feels just like a turbo has kicked in. The power keeps on coming up to its rev limit of 8,000 rpm. You are allowed to exceed the limit and continue up to 8,500 rpm for 1.5 seconds. The 6 gears are close enough together such that bringing it up to redline in any gear will ensure that you stay in the powerband as you upshift into the next gear. Redline in 2nd gear takes you above the highway legal speed limit. Redline in 3rd takes you past 145 km/h and you still have

three more gears to go. The top speed is given as 220 km/h. While the engine is not loud (compared to a Seven) it certainly is music to your ears in the powerband.

At the start, the brakes really squealed when stopping gently which was most of the time as the car is so light. It was embarrassingly loud and really annoying in stop and go traffic. Under hard braking, there was no problem. I read on the internet that it was due to the pads settling in. It took at least 3,000 km before the noise went away completely.

Now they are fully bedded in, the brakes are smooth and powerful. Check your rear view mirror before you hammer on the brakes! The ABS only kicks in when the wheels are actually starting to lock up, very unobtrusive. Same with the traction control, if you accelerate hard out of a corner you can feel the engine being cut for 1 or 2 beats and that's it. On public roads it is just about impossible to find the limits of adhesion, I chicken out way before then!! The car does not have as tight a turning circle as the Seven which caught me off guard several times requiring three-point turns where in the Seven I would just be able to do a U-turn.

The steering is not power assisted and is a little heavy at very slow speeds but once you are moving the weight is perfect. There is great feedback through the wheel. The car tracks straight and is not bothered by cross winds or trucks passing by requiring only a light hold on the wheel.

The suspension is tuned for handling but is not overly harsh in most circumstances. However, where there is a sharp drop or rise in the pavement the suspension tends to transmit all of that shock into the car. The car corners flat, keeping its tires firmly on the pavement.

In a 2006 and newer Elise you will never have a throttle cable brake and leave you stranded-it uses throttle-by-wire! According to the literature, when you shift, the throttle closes back in a controlled manner to reduce emissions. I understand it produces non-linear throttle openings that make it easier to drive at light throttle levels. Driving the car it is impossible to tell that there is no cable.

The stock tires on the Elise are Yokohama Advan AD07 with 175/55R16 on the front and 225/45R17 on the rear. The weight of the car is biased towards the rear (40:60), which is why the rear tires are so much wider than the fronts. I have not really tried them in the rain but they seem to have lots of good grip when wet and no signs of aquaplaning even in torrential downpours.

With the top up the car is relatively quiet but there is some wind noise from where the roll up windows meet the rubber of the soft top. The touring package gives you a thicker top that provides further sound insulation. After coming from a Seven, driving with the top off and windows up is positively luxurious. It is easy to carry on a conversation with the passenger along speeds below 100 km/h. Even with sunglasses on I found it hard to read the instruments with the top off on a sunny day so I wear a Lotus

baseball cap. You could never wear anything that wasn't strapped on in the Seven or else it would get blown away.

The seats are very comfortable and give plenty of support through 500 km drives (the most I have done in a day). They are made of soft perforated leather. The side bolsters are a grippy material to keep you in the seat. I don't know how they do it with a seat that is less than 1" thick. There is less than an inch of space under the seat which is why so many first time drivers or passengers are surprised that once they get over the wide sills they have to fall a long way down to the seats. In Lotus fashion, only the driver's seat can be adjusted back and forth (sliders are heavier than fixed seats and why would the passenger want to move anyway?).

The other thing about driving the car is the attention it generates.



I cannot take it out without having its picture taken. I have many people come screaming up beside me and then the passenger (or sometimes even the driver) snaps a photo or two, lots of wild smiles and thumbs up. It is amazing how many cell phones have cameras in them. The Seven would attract attention too, but never like this. No matter how far away I park the car in the parking lot I nearly always find someone looking at the car wanting more information. So far, I have only attracted appreciative attention from the men in blue.

I am finding the car a lot more useful than the Seven. Yes, I know the fully-carpeted boot is only marginally bigger but you can fit



enough in it. Last summer I had to take Gillian to her camp east of Bancroft (I left over an hour early and picked some really nice windy roads when I went to pick her up a week later). By sticking the top behind the seats I was able to get a large gym bag, a sleeping bag, a full size pillow and a few other odds and ends in the boot. It is quite comfortable on the highway with the top down. I take the car as often as I can even if I am only going to Canadian Tire.

The heater is NOT as powerful as the Seven but adequate. Of course, the Seven also had the heat from the exhaust system and the engine itself to help keep you warm. As the ultimate in luxury, on hot days, the Elise's air conditioning can be turned on. It is not a particularly powerful unit but helps to cool your feet off. With the top up when it is raining it keeps the windows demisted. There is no electric demisting on the glass rear window. There are four really nice round face level vents. The flow of air can be directed by moving the twin vanes and rotating the whole vent. The vents can be shut off by closing the vanes with a click.

The engine temperature remains fairly steady with it running in the range 188°-190°F as long as you are moving. If you get stuck in traffic, the electric fan kicks in at half speed at 208°F. At that point you can usually observe the digits slowly falling as you watch until it reaches about 204°F at which point the fan cuts off. You can see the heat haze come off the radiator when the fan kicks on. You can see the heat haze through the rear view mirror from the engine louvers too once the engine starts to get warm. The manual states that if the temperature reaches 217°F, the electric fan goes to high speed with an ultimate boil over point of 248°F.

One big disadvantage of the Elise compared to the Seven is trying to see anything while backing up. I think all mid-engined cars suffer from this problem. Certainly a Europa is as awkward to backup. A Seven with the top off is one of the easiest cars to backup and park (partly because you are sitting so far back you can almost touch the back of the car. I try to park the Elise so I



can drive forward. To help I have added a pair of small (2" diameter) stick-on convex mirrors (~\$2.50 at CTC). These enable you to see right along side the car and parking spot lines which otherwise would not be visible. I am a big advocate of the "new" way to adjust your driving mirrors. You are to move them "out" so that you can see the next lane over on multi-lane highways. With the convex mirrors you can see cars that are almost right beside you essentially eliminating all blind spots. The rear view mirror seems quite large (coming from a Seven). The mirrors have none of the blurriness that is associated with Seven mirrors. This took a while to get used to. I was used to seeing coloured smudges coming up behind you. The Elise even has sun visors, although their usefulness has yet to be discovered, as they are so small.

As far as modifications, I have done very little. The first time I used the horn I realized that I needed to get the upgraded horn. Now at least people can tell that I am using the horn. The sound from the radio was thin. The original retailed for only about \$40 a pair. I replaced the small lightweight 5" rear speakers with some heavier 6.5" speakers (speakers were over twice the weight). The hole had to be slightly enlarged, the mounting holes moved and a spacer inserted between the rear bulkhead and the speaker. The front speakers were replaced with a matching 4" speaker. The sound is better but it would benefit from an amplifier. I cannot find a place big enough to hide a 4-channel amplifier. There is no place under either seat or behind the dash and I am not willing to give up luggage space. It may be possible to fit a really thin amp



behind the fixed passenger seat, if I could find one that small. [Note I have received much ribbing from the Editor about paying attention to the radio when I should be listening the mechanical music of the engine].

I did some modifications you might call bling. I replaced the generic black plastic oil filler cap with a machined aluminium cap

that has a Lotus logo in the centre of it. I painted the two black plastic engine covers with a yellow paint that is close to the car colour. I took my spare nose badge from my Plus 2 that I had been keeping for over 30 years and mounted it on the cover. With a bit of black and yellow paint I highlighted the gear numbers and shift pattern on the gear shift knob.



Kevin bored a hole into the handbrake handle so that a lapel pin could be glued in. He then polished the end of the brushed aluminium handle so it shone. I made up some Lotus tire valve caps by buying some caps with a Honda logo from Ancaster Flea Market. I printed Lotus logos the right size on photographic paper and sealed them in with clear nail lacquer.



A couple of things I want to do. The 2007 cars have nice three-dimensional letters (L O T U S) across the back of the car to replace the silver foil letters on the earlier cars. These are available from the dealer. Also the 2007's have a leather handbrake lever boot but that is available only as a package when ordering the car. I have found some enterprising person on eBay who makes up boots.

There are some differences when storing this car. I was all ready to put the car up on blocks but the manual says NOT to jack the car up, probably to prevent people having it slide off the stands if they don't lift it in the right place for the rear. They recommend pumping the tires up to 60 psi and then moving the car periodically to prevent flat spots on the tires and bearings. I also took the precaution of pushing the brake pistons back so prevent the formation of rust on the disc. The battery, which is located in the boot, is being kept fully charged with a "battery minder". I wanted to pull the spark plugs so that I could put some oils down the piston bores but there is an ignition module on the top of each plug. I tried to release the electrical connection but I was scared I was going to break a wire so I decided just to start the car once a month during the winter. Even on the coldest days it started right away.

I can hardly wait for spring, I have sat in the car several times during the writing of this document, to check on some item that I was writing about, but lingered in the car a bit longer than was necessary. Then it will be on to my second year ... but that is a different story.

