

Magazine Watch

By Foster Cooperstein

(UK)

There's a brief blurb in the 15 March issue of Autocar about the new Esprit, complete with an artist's rendering of what they think the car will look like – very much M250ish. The car, undergoing crash testing, will be launched in early 2008. It will be smaller than a Ferrari or Lamborghini, according to Lotus design chief Russell Carr. Expect V8 power and twin turbos, BMW is mentioned as the likely engine source, with a 6 speed transmission. They expect to produce 2,500 cars per year, which seems high.

The Geneva show car, the APX, is featured on the cover of the 7 March issue of Autocar. Inside is a 2 page article about the APX, a 7 seat hatchback designed to show off Lotus Engineering's capabilities. APX stands for Aluminum Performance Crossover and the car is something of a mix between an MPV and a performance coupe. It is powered by Lotus' new 300 bhp V6 engine and uses Lotus' Variable Vehicle Architecture (VVA). The VVA technology is an aluminum chassis system perfect for limited production runs as the tooling cost is relatively low. It uses a series die cast aluminum corner nodes that are connected with low cost pieces, allowing for a variety of designs. This chassis is close to what the new Esprit will use.

The 21 February issue of Autocar includes their 2006 Reader's Poll. The Elise placed 5th in the "convertible" category with 7.4% of the vote as compared to category winner Aston Martin DB9 Volante's 12.1%.

Included with this issue of Autocar is a small booklet – Half-Price Heroes. Among the bargain priced (UK) used cars, are the Lotus Carlton (\$19,000 – but beware of a shortage of spare parts), the 2000 Exige at \$26,000 (but beware of oil blowing out of the tail pipe – may need valve seals) the 2001 Esprit V8 (\$35,000) and a 2002 Elise 111S (\$28,000 but be sure that the suspension has been rebushed and insist upon new tires). And the back cover is an ad for Lotus finance with 3 different Elises pictured.

According to the April issue of CAR, VW is talking with Lotus about putting VW's 3 wheeled concept car into production. Lotus' involvement would be to help with the R&D as well as to supply the front suspension and steering assembly, which is "virtually identical" to that of the Elise.

The January issue of Race Engine Technology contains a 3 page tribute to the late Keith Duckworth.

There are few articles in EVO's April issue that may interest Lotus related fans. The Caterham race academy, for entry-level racers, is the subject of a 5 page profile. It is highly recommended for the budding racer. Elsewhere in the issue is a time comparison for a number of cars for the west circuit at the Bedford Aerodrome, EVO's test track. The Caterham R500 Evolution was more than 4 seconds quicker than the runner up Porsche 911 GT3 RS. The Caterham also put in the absolute top speed. 10th was the Elise 111R, 10 seconds slower than the Caterham, but this time was set on a track with some damp spots. 52 cars were tested. The last Lotus related article is the second installment in the saga of building a Westfield' XI. Not all has gone smoothly in the project. For example, when the engine was installed, they found that they could not get the distributor cap on. Despite being told that they had the wrong distributor, they didn't. The solution arrived at was to put a spacer underneath the right hand engine mount. Other problems included fitting the radiator backwards. Other problems included installing the fuel tank, which required trimming away a bit of the body and slightly reshaping the tank. Clearly not a project for the non-mechanically inclined without a full workshop.

The "Star Car" in the April issue of Practical Classics is the restoration of a 1965 Elan S2. The owner has had the car since 1967 and is the only person to work on it during that period. The car was off the road for 10 years until 1998 when it was mechanically restored and last year the body and interior were done.

The April issue of Classic & Sports Car includes a 4 page article about the Lotus 47 and a 47 that was recently restored after a 30 year "sleep". This car, chassis 47-GT-68, was bought and restored by Martin Ricketts, son of Lotus fanatic Malcolm Ricketts.

There's an inset of the Elise S1 on the cover of the May issue of Thoroughbred & Classic Cars. Inside is a 3 page buyer's guide that includes what to look for (one of the most serious problems is the cylinder head gasket, also carefully check the suspension, particularly the shocks – if the car is more than 6 years old, be sure that the shocks have been replaced – they are expensive), who can help, what it costs to own one and a brief history of the car.

See the May issue of Car for 2 Lotus articles. The 1st is a 4 page article about the next Esprit (which may not be named Esprit). The car is due in early 2008. It will be rear wheel driven by a mid-engined V8. The

exterior, which will have some design cues from the 1st Esprit, is signed off on. They are working on the aerodynamics. The 1st version will be wingless but later, higher performance versions will have a rear wing. The cabin will be considerably larger, able to accommodate a 6' 5" person with size 15 feet.

This is important as half of the production is headed to this country (600+ cars). The chassis will use the Lotus VVA (Versatile Vehicle Architecture) system. According to the article's author, the car will be powered by a Lotus tuned version of BMW's 5 litre V8 from their E39 M5. The rumor is that Lotus will run it at at least 400 bhp, giving the car a power to weight ratio of 308 bhp/ton. Lotus' head honcho, Kim Ogaard-Nielsen says that the car will be a serious challenger to the 911.

Immediately following the Esprit piece, which contains a sidebar item about the APX, is a 2 page article about the Europa S. This is Lotus' 1st entry into the \$55,000 long distance sports car market. While Elise based, the Europa has more of everything – more engine, more weight, more interior and trunk space and more entry access. Production is targeted at 500 cars a year – and it will not be available in the US because the engine is not US certified.

It's off to snowy Denmark to visit the owner of 2 Sevens (Series II and IV) and a Marcos in the April issue of Classics Monthly. The original Ford Kent engine in the Series IV Seven has been replaced by a highly tuned 2 litre Zetec engine putting out 212 bhp! The car has also been lightened, losing more than 130 pounds and weighing in around 1200 pounds. This car is used for track days and some racing. The Series II car is an early twin cam engined car that came from Canada. Due to the current owner being 6' 5" tall, the car is for sale as he doesn't fit in it very well!

There are 2 spy pictures of the next Esprit in the 19 April issue of Autocar. The car is bigger than the old car; several inches longer and in the front track. The photographer said that the car has "massive" dampers, thought to be the key element in the car's active suspension. Also, the car is to have a Lotus transmission that is thought to use "launch control".

In the same issue is a 2 page Esprit buyer's guide. The S4 and S4s were the most highly recommended while the S1 and S2 cars, as well as the early V8s were said to be cars to stay away from.

The Spring issue of Classics Monthly compares the Talbot Sunbeam Lotus with the Vauxhall Chevette HS. The conclusion

Magazine Watch (Continued on page 10)

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GROUP LOTUS (Cont. from page 1)

address the key opportunities for Lotus for the future.

Kim Ogaard-Nielsen, former CEO of Group Lotus Plc, has stepped down to pursue his other entrepreneurial interests. Kim joined Group Lotus Plc in November 2004 and has presided over a number of projects during the past eighteen months. Lotus would like to record its thanks to him for his service to the company during this period.

Speaking from Lotus headquarters at Hethel today, Mike Kimberley said, "All specialist sports car companies operate in volatile and highly competitive markets. However, sales of the Elise are moving ahead in the USA and are being further enhanced by the new introduction of the Exige model. I can assure our customers, business partners and all who watch this iconic marque with interest, that Lotus is a highly valued and integral part of the Proton Group."

Notes: Mike Kimberley has been associated with the LOTUS brand for over 22 years, since joining its founder, the late Colin Chapman in 1969. He worked his way up the Company, was appointed as the Managing Director of Lotus Cars Ltd. between 1976 until 1983 and became the CEO of Group Lotus Plc between 1983 until the end of 1991.

Mike is a well-respected veteran of the automotive industry, having spent over 30 years with various world-renowned automotive companies including General Motors, Jaguar and Automobili Lamborghini SPA.

Two of his major achievements were the rejuvenation of Group Lotus Plc following the tragic loss of its founder, Colin Chapman in the late 1982 and the revival of the Italian supercar maker, Automobili Lamborghini SPA, in 1994.

More recently, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of Group Lotus plc as well as Lotus Group International in August 2005.

On the web:

New Lotus CEO Mike Kimberley has outlined his plans for the Norfolk firm in an exclusive interview with Autocar's Steve Copley. Chief among Kimberley's aims is a doubling of annual production from around 4000 cars to 8000, to be achieved through the expansion of the current Elise and Europa line-ups and the introduction of a new Esprit, due in 2008.

The new car is tipped for launch late next year. Like its predecessor, the new Esprit will be mid-engined, but targeted at the luxury supercar market. A BMW V8 is said to be the powerplant of choice, and the Esprit will showcase Lotus' expertise in extruded aluminum chassis manufacturing (as used in the APX concept car). The Esprit's successor is a mid-engined two-seater that will cost about £80,000.

Alongside an expansion of its own models, Kimberley also said that Lotus was 'certainly interested in new projects along the lines of the Lotus Carlton'. The 176mph super-saloon might not have been a huge sales success (it was a victim of the early '90s recession), but like the Lotus Cortina and Talbot Lotus Sunbeam before it, it emphasised the depth of Lotus's engineering know-how.

Plans are reported to use spare production capacity at Lotus' Hethel premises to make one or more niche models for big car manufacturers. He expects the first models for an undisclosed maker to be in production in 2008.

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