

ACROSS THE POND

By Gordon Morris

In the course of my travels, I've visited most of the main International race tracks in Europe and North America – with the exception of Le Mans. For the past two years, I've listened to UK Lotus friends waxing lyrical about how much they enjoyed the Classic version of the famous 24 hour race, so this year I set off across the Channel with 30 Historic Lotus Register members and friends to see what all the fuss was about.

Those who had been before had made arrangements for us to stay at a Relais - a sort of French Bed & Breakfast - 15 miles to the west of Le Mans – for the four days of the event, and for us to have all the tickets and passes that are part and parcel of events like this.

This summer has been the hottest, sunniest and driest in living memory, but I set off for Portsmouth in my Elan in a downpour of biblical proportions. Thankfully, my hood (top) keeps most of the rain out and I just managed to get out of the village before floods closed the roads. An hour later, I met up with fellow travellers at a pub on the way to Portsmouth in bright warm sunshine. The hood came off, on went the tonneau and the Elan stayed in that rig for the rest of the trip.

The car ferry from Portsmouth to St Malo was a moving classic car show – there were hundreds of sports cars of every make and colour, ranging from vintage Bentleys to brand new Aston Martins. A good dinner on board, a comfortable cabin and an early breakfast saw this amazing collection of cars set loose in St Malo the next morning. We had decided beforehand that we'd avoid the French toll roads and the main trunk routes, taking, where possible, country roads and stopping for coffee and lunch en route. Road racing was definitely out – we had all day to cover 125 miles – so we enjoyed a leisurely run through Normandy towards our Relais in the bright sunshine that was to become a feature of the French part of this trip.

Once established in our temporary home, a few of us set out to Le Mans to spy out the lie of the land and to work out a route in and out of the track. As events proved, this was time well spent: we marked out an area within the Lotus paddock and discovered the best entry and exit routes. Unlike many big race organisers, Classic Le Mans managed to avoid queues at entry points – each day we were able to drive straight to our paddock without stopping.

We found ourselves within the Lotus area

organised by Club Lotus France, accompanied by most of the European Lotus clubs. The HLR enclave consisted of a couple of Sixes, five Sevens, a Mark Nine, five Elevens, a pair of Elites, my Elan and a Plus Two, together with a 'guest' BMW CSL, Swallow Doretti and an Ashley/Singer/MG Special. Our slot was alongside the Bugatti circuit, behind the pits and paddock of the main 9 mile race track, and beside the Porsche display of over 1,000 cars.

Practice and racing went on, day and night, over three days. In recognition of the age of the cars and the sheer volume of the entry, cars were grouped according to vintage and raced for four hours at a time. Philip Walker won his group convincingly in his 1959 Lotus 15. The Jaguar C and D Type, Aston Martin DB3S, Ferrari Testa Rossa and GTO and Ford GT40 were designed to run at Le Mans; the spectacle of seeing such wonderful cars, racing where they did so many years ago, was breathtaking.

Also breathtaking, but for a different reason, were the two laps of the track that we ran on the Saturday morning in the company of 200 other sports cars. We drove the full 8.5 mile track - Dunlop Bridge, Arnage, Maison Rouge, Porsche Curves, White House and the Mulsanne Straight – together with numerous chicanes to keep speeds within reasonable bounds. My Elan will safely do 6,250 rpm in top gear – about 115 mph. It would do more but I try not to over rev as the crank is the standard iron one. On the straights, I drove down the right hand side of the track while GT40s, Ferraris and Lamborghinis flashed past on the left as if I was standing still. It was a different matter in the chicanes and corners where the nimble Lotus saw off much heavier metal, only to be outdragged on the straights. Acutely conscious that I was over 200 miles from home, I breathed a sigh of relief when I parked a very hot Elan after an exhilarating drive.

The whole of the Le Mans region was, as the French say, en fete this weekend. All the bars and cafes for miles around were bedecked with flags of all nations, we were greeted with waves and car horns as we drove through villages and the atmosphere was electric. Everyone set out to have a good

time in a historic setting and we certainly achieved that.

Everything comes to an end, so, after seeing France narrowly lose the final of the World soccer Cup, we drove north through Alencon, Gace, Vimoutiers and Lisieux to catch the ferry home from Caen. True to form, we landed at Portsmouth in a thunderstorm, which abated as I got home. This was such a marvellous trip that we've booked the Relais for the next event in 2008. The wonderful en fete atmosphere reminded me of down town Watkins Glen during vintage race meetings a few years ago. Soon after we returned home, we discovered that we (and Club Lotus France) had won the organisers' prize for the stand that best portrayed the history of the marque.

There are now three Lotuses in the Morris fleet. Jan wanted to replace her Miata with something different, but I was surprised when, after a fine Historic Lotus lunch at a nearby stately home, she suggested that a M100 Elan might fit the bill. So we found a suitable car and took delivery of a 1991 Monaco white Elan SE last week. So far, it goes well and Jan's got used to a very different car. For my sins, I had always disregarded the M100 as being too "new" and never really considered it as a practical proposition for us. I now have to reconsider that position, as it seems to be every inch a Lotus and in keeping with its heritage. My only reservation is that I wish they had called it something else beginning with E. To my, perhaps blinkered, mind there can only really be one Elan. ●



Photo by David Nagler

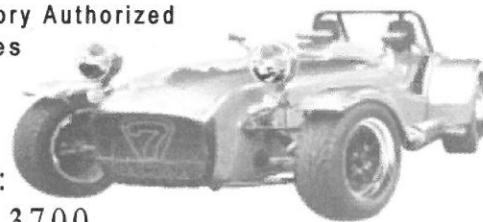
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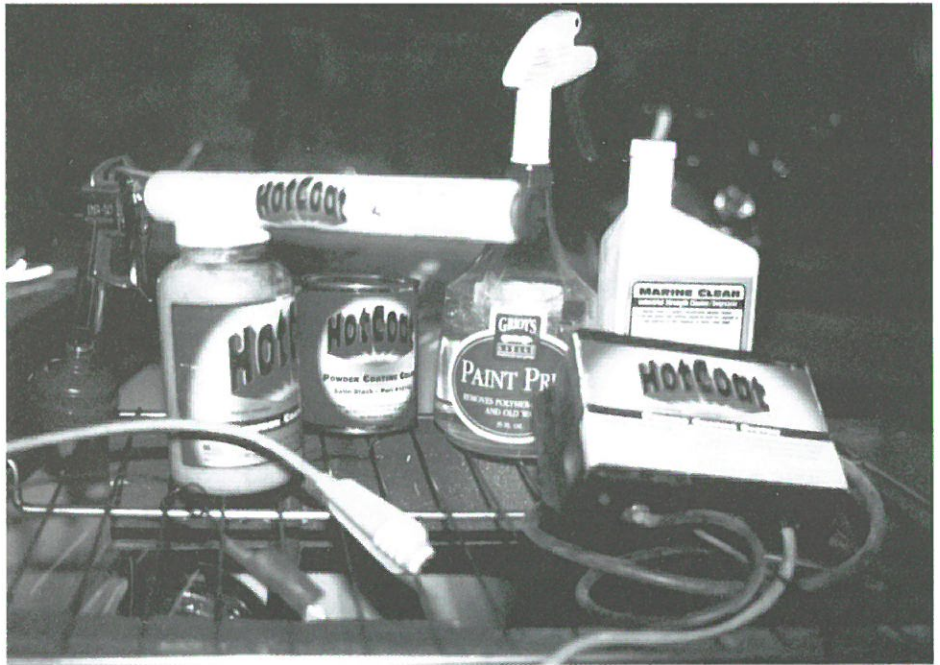
Powder Coating at Home

Article and Photos By David Koski

While commercial/industrial powder coating is widely available, a small powder-coating gun is now available from the Eastwood Company (263 Shoemaker Rd., Pottstown PA 19464, www.eastwoodco.com, 1-800-345-1178) that is within the budget of most hobbyists. I have been using the Eastwood unit for about three years and would like to share some information, which I hope will be useful to those involved in restoration projects.

The basic theory and practice of commercial powder coating was well-explained in a previous reMARQUE article (March 2002 issue) and I will not repeat it; rather, I would like to pass on some tips for those wishing to explore this technology in their home shops.

Powder coating offers some significant advantages over traditional solvent-based paint systems. Chief among these from an automotive hobbyist's standpoint is the coating's resistance to petroleum based solvents, oil, and gasoline. Many of us have spent literally hundreds of hours polishing under hood components, especially those made of aluminum, only to have them develop orange fuel stains and dull white aluminum oxide corrosion within a few short months. The under hood gloss clear lacquers previously available quickly turn dull and gummy in the presence of gasoline and will oxidize to an unpleasant yellow hue within a few years even if kept immaculately clean.



Utilizing a gloss or matte clear powder coat protective finish, under hood aluminum parts such as carburetor bodies, fuel pumps, and throttle linkages can be buffed to an original finish or highly polished and maintained in an attractive, as manufactured appearance indefinitely. I can tell you from personal experience that there is little you can do for the appearance of your car that will impress a car show judge more, than maintaining the engine bay in an "as on the day of delivery" or better appearance. They may look at the paint and undercarriage and interior, but it's those subtly polished carburetors and engine accessories that really "knocks their socks off."

A second advantage is the improved abrasion and chip resistance of powder coat over paint. Powder coat application is also not prone to sags, run, and chips as are liquid paints and there is much more uniform coating on irregular surfaces (less fill in of depressions and low areas and better coverage of sharp edges and corners). Solvent-based lacquers tend to be brittle and crack-prone, while enamels

are slow to cure and remain "tender" and easily damaged for prolonged periods of time. Powder coated parts are ready for use immediately on cooling and the coating is flexible enough to hold up well even when applied to springs. The application equipment is faster, easier and neater to clean up than solvent based products and highly toxic solvents are avoided.

Everything of course has a down side. The chief disadvantage of powder coating at home is the necessity for a source of heat to cure the powder. The heat source ideally must have no open flame (no gas ovens), must have accurately controllable temperature and must be large enough to contain the part being coated without touching it. For small parts such as carburetor linkage, a toaster oven is ideal. For larger parts, I installed an electric kitchen range in my shop. Older used ones are available very cheaply (sometimes free) from appliance dealers but I brought mine from my parent's house when they moved. The 220-volt wiring can be a problem though, if your shop wasn't set up for it. For very large parts such as frames, an infrared system is available from Eastwood but it's basically easier to just take them to a shop with a large curing oven. I use one at a steel fabrication shop a couple hundred yards from my front door and I live in the middle of nowhere. Another disadvantage is that while the range of colors available is extensive, it is not infinitely variable as is the case with blended liquid paints. These disadvantages are small given the general utility of the system.

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