

LOTUS NOTES



THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF LOTUS CLUB VICTORIA and LOTUS CLUB QUEENSLAND



- Corona Project
- Lotus Club Drive In a Covid 19 Environment
- Gippsland Sunday Sojourn
- Molloy Beats Stokell

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Just the right weather for an Early Morning Run. Thanks to James Hall, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, for the photo. And no Covid splodges, just for Sandra.

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Lotus Notes Magazine Editorial

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Queensland President's Report

by Steve Lennox



We are back ... in a limited format, the DTC went off in June with Evan Molloy setting a new track record and Gideon Street managing to organise morning and afternoon sessions to meet the maximum number restrictions. All had a great time getting back into motorsport. More to come with Morgan Park B series round 3 the first weekend of August.

The July DTC has been moved to the 'Ekka' day holiday, which is on Friday 14th August, we are hoping to run the normal full day format. This may change depending on the current level of restrictions.

Inter Club Challenge has also restarted with limited events for those who are competing. Please check the club calendar and look out for emails that will be updated as we get more information.

We also had our first Day Run. This was a great drive, organised by John Barram, ending up with a picnic lunch at Moogerah Dam. The event was very well organised and illustrated just how we can run these social drives safely.

Grand Tour – Friday 2nd to Sunday 4th October

As I expect most of you will have seen in the emails, this is now finalised, and it is going to be a great weekend. For this drive we head north to the Fraser Coast, then back through the South Burnett region, a good three days, and two nights. Stopping at the expected cafés, restaurants and attractions specially selected by Ken Philp (and we all know that it is going to be sensational). We have even managed to secure the steam train ride through Maryborough.

The committee are working on the return of monthly meetings, with a possible chance of us being able to host meetings at alternate venues, as Shannon's doesn't expect to have the rooms open until late this year or early next year. This is becoming difficult as most venues aren't taking group bookings. I am hoping that by the time you read this we have already had a get together of some kind that could be considered a club meeting.

On a personal note, I have received great advice and assistance from club members to get my Europa suspension geometry set up "Properly", and what a difference this has made. It is like a new car. I can drive with confidence and ease, the car just goes where I point it. Having access to friendly members with know-how is one of the best reasons to be in a club like ours. The shared experience and like-mindedness is a truly rewarding part of being in the club. So, thanks to those members.

Magazine content and stories are always required so please keep writing them.

Until next month, keep safe and enjoy the return to normal

Victoria ADDING Lightness

by Vicky Rowe



Lockdown #2 may have cancelled our motorsport events, EMRs and face-to-face club meetings for a little while, but at least we managed to enjoy a couple of club events over the past month.

June's anti-social EMR, the first in a few months, had it all. Heavy fog, glorious sunshine, fabulous roads and stunning scenery. Old members, new members, old cars, new cars and a couple that didn't want to go. It was a much needed dose of soul food. I hope it won't be long till we're out there again.

Sticking with the virtual club meeting format for the July meeting turned out to be a wise decision. So too was having Richard Parramint join us from his home in Norwich, telling tales about Lotus and some of the colourful characters from years gone by. Thanks to Richard for providing an entertaining, and at times fascinating, chat. If you missed it, or any other virtual club meetings, you'll find recordings on the LCV website.

I'm sure some of you are making good use of the ISO downtime, restoring, repairing or enhancing your car. Why not share? Take some pics, write a story, or share your knowledge during one of the club meetings. We'd appreciate contributions from members to our monthly magazine. Or let us know if you have any suggestions, or requests to contributions for a virtual club meeting.

Otherwise, how about picking up the phone to call one of your fellow members and ask RUOK? This is a really difficult time for many right now and it may just make their day to hear from you. Or it could make your day!

Stay safe and well.



Letter to the Editor

Hi Peter

You're looking for magazine contributions? Here's one with a Holden/photography connection. And sex. I can do a Stirling Moss/Dennis Jenkinson one (without any sex) as well if you like?

Even in our locked-down Covid-19 mode, car connections still pop up, like an email that appeared in my inbox from Cristian Brunelli – he's a car photographer and you can find his work at Instagram @cristianbrunelli. He asked if I could tell him anything about Adrian van Valen, and indeed I could.

Adrian was from Melbourne and was an inspiration or mentor to Cristian in his early professional days. As Australians do, Adrian had gone off to London early in his career, where Maureen, my wife, worked with Adrian's wife. This was nearly 50 years ago. As a result we met lots of Australians, all from Melbourne, and so, when we came to Australia in 1972 it was to Sydney. If you're only going to be in Australia for a brief spell (we hadn't intended to stay) make it in Sydney, those patriotic Melburnians all said.

Back in London Adrian was just getting a foot in the door as a car photographer, but things had moved along enough that in 1977 he had quite a reputation for his automotive photography, and he contacted us to say Holden were flying him back to Australia to photograph new cars. Things had also moved along enough that he was bringing a camera assistant – in those days it meant someone to load the film into the spare camera, hand over the other lens and so on. Things hadn't moved along enough to pay for a hotel for the camera assistant, however, so could we put him up? We didn't even have a second bedroom, but he was welcome to use the sofa in the living room we suggested.

A few days later, Alan – I really can't remember his name, and I hope I've got that wrong to protect the guilty – rang the doorbell and we let him in. He was in his early 20s and proceeded to recount his adventures on the Qantas flight from London. On the Singapore-Sydney leg the hostie had virtually jumped on top of him when the lights were low, he reported. 'Nice fantasy,' we thought and poured him another glass of wine.

'She left the flight in Sydney,' he continued, 'but said she'd try to come down to Melbourne while I'm here.'

'Keep dreaming,' we thought, until an hour or two later when the doorbell rang again and a very attractive young lady marched in, pretty much lifted Alan off his feet and carried him off to the sofa in the living room.

A few days later Adrian took these photos of me in a new Holden GTS descending the hairpins at Arthur's Seat – I'd been roped in as the driver-model, after all, I was free. The photos were used in an ad, a catalogue or something. Alan still seemed very jet lagged. Or perhaps it was exhaustion? Sadly Adrian died in 2006.

Tony Wheeler



1977 Holden GTS, Arthur's Seat



Member Profile

Barry Rowe (Past Member)



Barry Rowe

Peter R Hill



Current owners of Elises, Exiges and Evoras enjoying their cars on the track mirrors the early days of Lotus in Australia when Elite, Elan and Europa owners regularly competed on circuits and at popular hillclimbs. Barry Rowe was one such competitor and I caught up with him after his son-in-law and LCV member Haydn Morrell told the editor about some of Barry's Lotus and motorsport escapades.

Barry is a Bendigo boy who has lived in the Victorian gold town all his life. Barry's first Lotus was a white Europa S2, a 1969 model that he purchased when it was only 11 months old.

This car came from a Melbourne doctor whose pregnant wife couldn't get into it. Years later that doctor moved to Bendigo and ended up owning a Plus 2 Elan that Barry had owned.

Barry sold his first Europa but it wasn't long before it was replaced by a yellow one, also a '69 model. He repainted the car blue and, having bought the Europa for competition, it was dispatched to Bob Watson's workshop. The suspension was modified and an alloy roll-cage added. The engine was rebuilt and the engine builder's eyes lit up when Barry

provided him with an unopened Gordini kit for the TS crossflow motor. The result was 160bhp which helped deliver trophies in the sprints and hillclimbs that he entered, including Winton, Calder, Sandown, Lakeland, Tarrengower, Camperdown, and Morwell.

Rather than haul the Europa around in a trailer, Barry acquired a six-wheel Holden HQ tip tray ute and some long ramps.

Barry told me that he was attracted to a Europa because, to him, it was the closest thing to a GT40, a car that he loved. He joined the Victorian branch of CLA in the 70s, having bought an Elan Plus 2 in '73. The Plus 2 was his daily driver but he only kept it for six months. An Elan S4 soon joined the family, ostensibly as his wife's car. A friend had brought the car back from England. Barry fell in love with the Elan. He never raced it.

There were forays into single-seater racing with a Gemini Formula Junior and the Peregrine. In the latter,





he found himself on the grid close to Bib Stillwell and was able to keep the champion in sight until Stillwell spun and hit the wall in his Repco Brabham, so Barry beat him.

In total he owned three Europas, the last one being a red Series 1 that previously had a rotary engine fitted and was damaged. Barry bought it without the engine with the intent of fixing and rebuilding it to use for the Targa Tasmania. He acquired a Renault 17 TS (Gordini) fuel injected motor from Alpine Affair, with a five-speed gearbox, but then he heard about the 25th anniversary London to Sydney rerun, so the Europa was jettisoned and replaced by an MGB GT. Only pre-1968 cars were allowed to enter the rally, and, as Barry had owned a new MGB in 1968 when he followed the adventures of the London to Sydney on his AWA radio, he figured that the GT version would be a good vehicle for the rerun, and so it proved.

The GT he purchased was a USA car so he converted it to right-hand drive, which he said was fairly easy. As hoped, the MG proved to be a rugged and reliable car for the rally. Unlike many of the entrants, the MG had to carry all the spares, etc., which diminished its performance but was far less expensive than the luxury of a support vehicle. When he got to Australia the car was relieved of its burden and immediately ran regularly in the overall top twenty on the Australian stages.

After the London to Sydney the MGB GT was used for two Round Australia rallies in '95 and '98, then circuit racing, before it was sold to an

aspiring rally driver. The new owner competed in a single rally before abandoning his competition ambitions.

The car was housed in a friend's garage for a while, then, after outstaying its welcome, it was parked unceremoniously on an Albert Park street under a tree. Barry had a rough idea where the car was and hankered to get it back. Tenaciously he tracked it down using Google Earth and after three years it returned to the Rowe family, where, following some relatively minor refurbishment, it still resides along with another GT and a roadster.

Barry has owned about ten Porsches and it was one of these that, fourteen years ago, almost ended his life. Racing in the Porsche 944 series Barry had a massive crash at Calder. It was just shy of one year later that he left hospital with more titanium plates and screws than he can count. Despite his mobility being seriously impacted and the need to use crutches, but more often a wheelchair, Barry's enthusiasm for motoring was undiminished. The family pool of vehicles changed somewhat to allow for his mobility restrictions plus the

need for space for a wheelchair. Automatic transmission now features in his MGB Roadster and a GT.

Barry is no longer in the Lotus Club but is actively involved in the Bendigo Sports Car Club that he founded. He still uses his MGB GT regularly. I wonder if he'd consider a 1980s Excel?

Since I wrote this story Barry's wife Sharyn saw the last line, had a look at a picture of an Excel, and Barry is now looking for one.





THE FORD GEAR BOX

Some words of caution

by Greg Bray

Be careful when driving your Lotus 7 up onto your trailer. Making sure that the rear cross bar of the trailer is low enough to clear the gear box drain plug, so it doesn't hit the bar. Because the plug will, and does, break the casing which is thinner than you think.

Ford gear boxes used in Elans and '7' run all the intermediate gears steel-on-steel with oil ways on the main shaft. They can only take the oil level so low before gear seizes on shaft, which I've had happen a number of times. The car only wants to drive in one gear, and move forward in neutral. Other gear box manufactures either have a bronze bush or a caged needle roller bearing and therefore can take the low oil without seizes. Fords are the only manufacturer that I know that did it on the cheap without bearings in gears.

Broken gear case, plug hitting trailer not an uncommon problem



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Corona Project

by Chris O'Connor



The "Italian Job" Mini

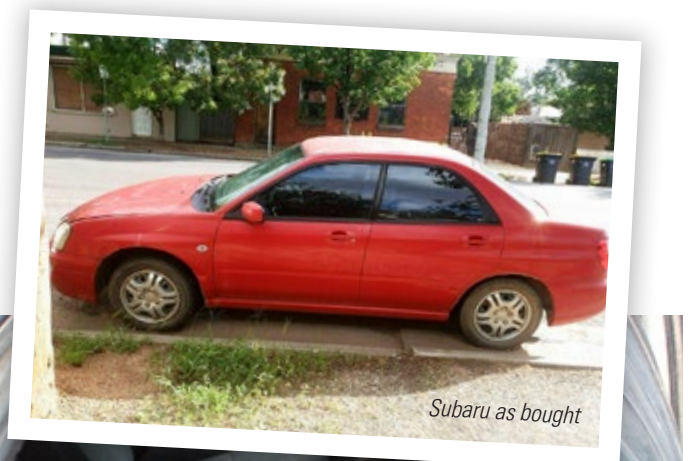
My daughter Bridget has been enthusiastically participating in Kyneton Car Club (KCC) Autocross for the past eighteen months or so in an "Italian Job" Mini.

Between events we towed the Mini to David Mottram's property at Drummond to have a drive around there. Once she turned sixteen we were able to get the "L"s and set off on the highways and byways (whatever they are).

I was wondering what her vehicle progression would be after the Mini so I started perusing eBay for likely candidates. I saw a 2002 Impreza GX Sedan which looked a bit rosey so I kept an eye on it. It was described as straight, a couple of dents on the RHS doors, roadworthy tyres and a possible blown head gasket. The auction ended with me as the top bidder at \$220.50. We picked it up at the end of March just as Corona restrictions were setting in.

We got the car home and a couple of things stood out.

- (1) It was the dustiest car I had ever encountered, dustier than if it had spent a hot summer's day at the autocross track.
- (2) The possible blown head gasket was actually a seized engine; and
- (3) The tyres were not roadworthy.



Subaru as bought



A very dirty car...



... but Rex didn't seem to mind



The wreck



The wreck

I immediately began the search for an EJ20 and they were not that thick on the ground. I happened upon Pickle's Salvage Cars auctions and soon found a 2003 GX hatch that was a bit shorter than standard with both ends stoved in. I did the last minute bidding thing and won the auction at \$280 (which soon became \$400 after the various charges were added). Bridget and I headed out to pick it up and what an eye-opener. There were rows and rows of mutilated cars stacked up on each other. The cheerful forklift driver took our order and soon delivered the Suby hatch and plonked it on our trailer.

We got it home and as we were pushing it up the drive-way I noticed the brake lights come on. Bridget and my son Liam (future Autocrosser) suggested I start it. I thought that this was futile as the car looked totally unloved and desolate. One turn of the key and it burst into life to my absolute shock. Result – a running engine and a good battery.

Corona restrictions had now come fully into force and this coincided with school holidays for Bridget and me, so we set to work. We cleaned the sedan (mainly the interior) and found this can of spray paint that was for painting cloth seats, trim and carpets, so a couple of cans of this were applied to all the fabric. We pulled out the old, sick engine and popped in the fresh hatch engine.

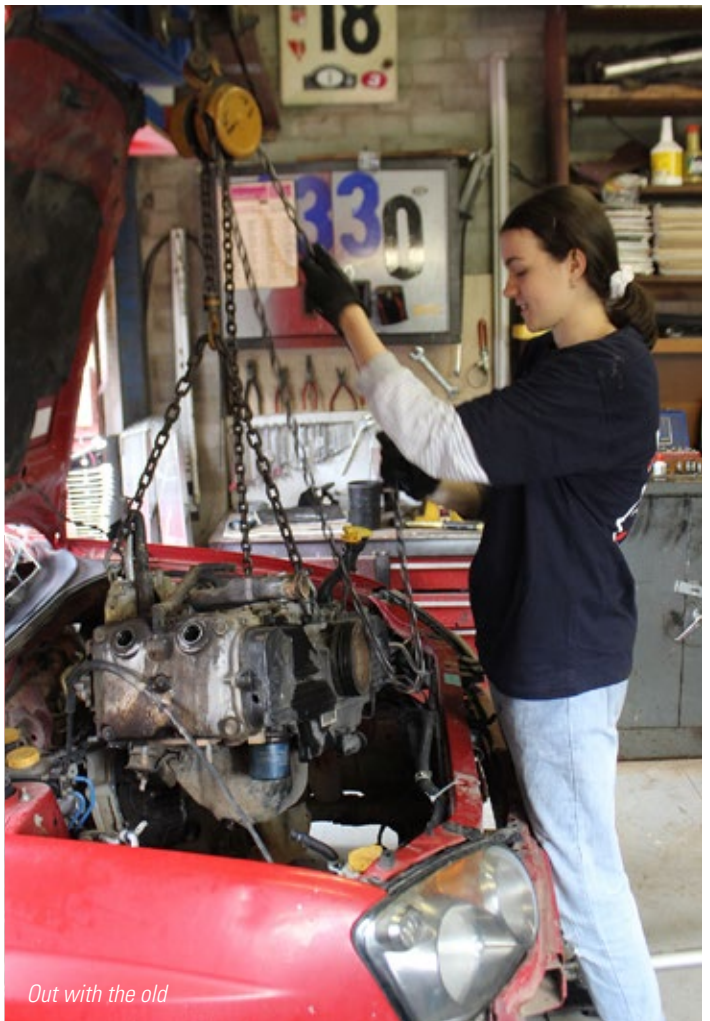
The hatch had a brand new set of tyres, excellent brakes and a you-beaut bluetooth and ipod capable stereo (this had been installed by the local butcher and the re-installation into the sedan involved cutting and splicing 14 wires). We put in the fresher hatch suspension but found that the car sat up very high (more of this later). EBay delivered a timing belt, clutch, alloy radiator and silicon hoses (\$220 for the radiator and hoses!) and other bits and pieces.



Repairs



Dents



Out with the old



We snuck down to Supercheap and got filters and oils (which cost more than the car did), fitted all these shiny and slimy new bits and soon had a clean, running car.

The dents to the RHS doors looked difficult and fiddly so we set about painting the RHS doors from the hatch (as well as a few other repairs to the body). My friends were pleased to hear that Bridget was doing all of the painting but were alarmed that I was to be her teacher. Anyway, we got the doors painted with some colour matched Supercheap paint and fitted them to the sedan.

The front door was OK (not too shiny but it'll do) but the back door was all wrong. Turns out the rear hatch doors and the rear sedan doors are different (anybody want to buy a rear hatch door in not so shiny red?). We hastily continued the abandoned repairs on the rear door.

Bridget painted it and we stuck it on the car. Once the Corona restrictions were lifted I took the car down for a RWC and, after a little effort, the biggest items being a new windscreen (Roy's Windscreens – \$155 and the yellowed headlights which took ages to get OK) I got the RWC and, after a visit to Vicroads, the rego plates. Turnaround time was two months with most of the delays being the wait for the restrictions to lift. Being unable to restrain myself, once the car was regoed, I found a shiny set of mags on eBay and a set of coilovers from Gumtree. I'm not so sure about the coilovers but they were cheap and they are ride height adjustable (and they are blingy gold).

We are looking forward to getting to know the car and to zooming it around the Kyneton Car Club autocross and, maybe one day in the future, an MSCA sprint.






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LOTUS ELEVEN REPAIR

New Front Clam



by Alister Rees



Apologies for missing last month's edition of this riveting (and welding/hammering) story. Progress has been slower than anticipated, due to restrictions around the Covid 19 challenge that has affected most businesses in Australia.

In the June edition we finished at the stage where the three main sections of the new front clam were tack welded and fused into one piece with all major reference points aligning.

As this front clam is going to be file finished and polished, the two main welds that join the front wings to the bonnet are critical in their execution. Each of these weld runs is 1.4 metres long and must be performed in one continuous operation (photos 1&2). Any variation in pace will cause a blow hole if too slow, or a shallow weld if the pace increases slightly. Shallow welds are a serious problem, as over time these will crack from the continual vibration. (NOTE – to put this into context, this is two pieces of 1.6mm thick aluminium, edge to edge!)

When these welds are completed, the clam is flipped over and the same process is repeated on the inside.

To add to the challenge, the new body has been shaped freehand over one side of the original body, (as mentioned in the June edition) because we are working without a buck. This can cause slight variations in the joins which need to be corrected in the file finishing stage, adding more tedious checks and test fitting over the chassis, to ensure both the shape of the new front clam and the alignment with the car are correct (photo 3).

As the part is now too large to fit through the English wheel, these welds must now be dressed and blended out by hand using a variety of hammers and dollies, to bring the welded area to the same thickness as the surrounding metal. (At last count Adam has 43 hammers and 57 different shape dollies.)

With these final welds now blended in, the next step, before file finishing can begin, is to fabricate a temporary brace to be tack welded across the rear edge to give some rigidity to the panel during the file finish process (photo 4). Once this is completed this brace will be removed (too heavy) and a 4mm stainless wire edge will be rolled in (to add lightness).

It is now time to start the file finish process which will initially be done on the centre section out to the centreline of the front wings. This area needs to be completed before the grille opening section can be fitted.

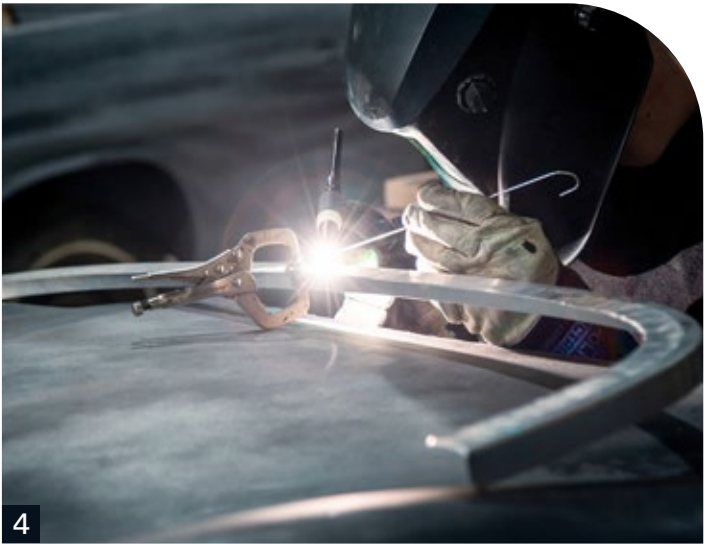
At this point I would like to give the reader an explanation of the file finishing procedure and why it is necessary.

The file finish process was used extensively in the "old days" to achieve a quality finish, along with lead wiping on steel panels that were then painted. However, with the advent of polyester fillers in the 1960s, and under increasing pressure from insurance companies to drive down costs, file finishing became a dying art, now practiced by only a limited number of skilled craftsmen, when specified by discerning clients.

Now back to aluminium – An off-the-wheel finish is satisfactory if the body is to be painted, as any minor blemishes left by the wheel are faired with polyester filler before priming. However, as this car must retain its exposed aluminium finish, fillers of any kind cannot be used, so the file finishing is necessary to achieve the polished surface.

File finishing is essentially the process of refining the shape. This means adjusting the profile by hand, using specialist hammers and dollies to flatten any minute highs, stretching low points around join lines and correcting the overall curvature of the panel.

First a guide coat is sprayed on the surface (fast drying etch primer), then using a body file with light pressure across the surface, the guide coat



is removed from the high areas and is left on the low areas, giving the "guide" to where the metal must be raised or lowered. (photo 5).

The highs are carefully massaged using a body-spoon. Then the low areas are stretched, using a slapping file while holding the correct shape forged dolly tool under the skin.

A final check spray of guide coat is then applied, and the process repeated until a smooth flowing body shape is ready to be sanded (photo 6).

The file is only used to highlight any highs or lows in the surface, NOT to remove metal, so that all minute blemishes in the surface are painstakingly removed by massaging the metal to a perfect form, rather than grinding and thinning out the material.

This is what defines a coachbuilding artisan from a panel beater (with all due respects to panel beaters of course) and will give the reader a clear understanding of why a polished aluminium body is a rare sight these days.

The skill sets required to achieve a true file finish for polished aluminium, requires a level of natural ability and skill that is very rare. The hand-eye coordination, and the ability to "feel" the metal surface with the hand, is the reason the perfect file finish is so difficult to achieve.

Once this process was completed on the centre section, the next task was to fabricate the tubular grille frame and mounting points that hold the entire front clam onto the car. With the new frame fabricated, the grille opening skin was formed over the frame, creating the beautiful rounded edge of the Eleven's distinctive front

We then welded the grille opening skin into the front clam (photo 7). The sub-assembly (comprising the tubular grille frame welded to the mounting points) was then fitted to the clam skin, and the front clam was trial fitted to the chassis for the first time (photo 8).

To be continued





Lotus Club Drive in a Covid 19 Environment

by John Barram photos: Steve Lennox



The Dax ready to go

While the blue sky and sunshine of the previous week was replaced by drizzly rain on the day, we had 16 cars at the start, including a friend of a friend with his son in a DAX clubman. The start was at Fernvale where there is plenty of room in the park and coffee was available across the road. While some people stayed in their cars, there were plenty of elbow bumps and greetings between club members who had not seen each other for many months. I saw no kissing or hugging or otherwise naughty behaviour. So far so good. All drivers already had the navigation information which had been provided electronically so there was no need for the usual coming together for a "drivers briefing". We simply sent the cars off in two loose groups with a ten minute gap in the middle.



The world has changed. It will never be the same again. How many times have we heard that lately? No doubt it is true but I still want to drive my Lotus.

Like many others, when Queenslanders were allowed to drive recreationally in a 50km radius from home I studied the maps, got out the Lotus, and away we went with just a few friends. When it was 100km we went that far. But the limits on social contact remain, so the challenge became to run a club drive while keeping safe and staying within the rules. This was mulled over by the club executive for a few weeks and the club drive on 28 June was the result.

Travelling with all cars in a line has its problems at the best of times, so we decided to give drivers a written description of our start and finish points, towns, distances and major intersections in between, so that everyone could find their own way to the end. There would be no need to group together at the start and no need to stop and re-group the cars during the drive.

After a quick tour of the Rosewood area and Mount Walker we headed up the Warrego Highway to Aratula for our first stop. Now this had been carefully selected as a place with three service stations and two cafes all within sight in the main street, to enable people to find refreshments without crowding together. The Lotus cars were well spread out as planned.

We had intended to gather the cars before setting off for the second leg of the drive, but as people already knew where we were going and how to get there, the drivers were taking the initiative and setting off in twos and threes for the drive to the picnic area at Moogerah Dam.

The light showers on the day meant that a short section of unsealed roadwork, which had not been there when I surveyed the route, was a bit muddy, but this section of the drive was otherwise uneventful.

As far as I know nobody got lost on that trip and in fact a couple of extra people turned up at the lunch point. Club members had been advised to bring their own lunch and seating. We were at a rather popular picnic spot with great views of the border ranges and we were by no means alone. But there was plenty of room for us all to spread out although most ended up in the area around a covered picnic table which we were able to snag. People enjoyed their lunches while socialising at respectable distances.



Parking was a bit tight



Spaced around the picnic table



Colin's Elan

By this stage the showers had ceased and people seemed in no hurry to leave, with many taking the option of a walk across the Dam wall before the trip home. A number of people said they had enjoyed the way this drive had been organised, so I think there are a few lessons here in how to run a social drive whether under Covid 19 limitations or not.



Elises



Gippsland Sunday Sojourn

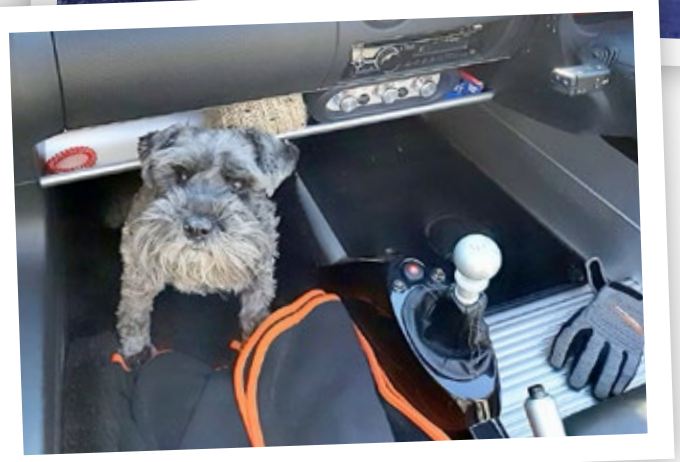
28 June 2020

by Sean Hamilton



An inaugural Lotus Club Vic anti-social EMR fortunately squeezed in between two COVID lock-downs. It's been a while, so we had a terrific turnout – 24 cars lined up at BP Officer, all revved up, rugged up and keen to get cracking into the cold chill and fog. True to sporting-car form, a few of us with heat vents cranked up high, ready to tackle the route with our roofs off and stowed.

So as to adhere to the strict social distancing measures, and not overload the first two-hour stage break at Archies Creek Pub with too many drivers ordering takeaway coffee, the pack was split into two groups. The lead pack led by Vicky, their trailing exhausts barking and snarling down the M1 on-ramp. Then a 10 minute separation time gap to the second pack led by myself. It was my debut in both planning a Lotus Club EMR and also to be honoured with leading seasoned Lotus drivers all idling, line-astern, behind me. I confess to a little apprehension sensing I'd need to crank up my A-game to set a handy pace but also keen not to drop anyone off our pack. The fog was challenging, trying to identify the first few quick left/right turn intersections. Fortunately my group hovered on my tail and knowing these exhilarating Gippsland backroads well enough, I didn't need to navigate. So once we were settled and winding our way up towards the ranges it was fun white-knuckling it, anticipating the fogged-in road direction and speed of the bends and twists, feeling our way up through the fog into the clearing sunshine. We had the roads all to ourselves, the morning's cow milking already done. But dodging the ambush of wet cow patties was impossible. An interesting tasty dairy-aroma permeating through the air vents, my pet miniature schnauzer doing her own donut burn-outs on the passenger floor in excitement.





Thanks Eddie for your support and assistance, as always. Thanks too, to you all for participating in my first planned Lotus Club EMR. It was fantastic to see you all again. Stay safe. Stay tuned for more spectacular Gippsland Ranges touring – God’s-own countryside right at our doorstep. How lucky we are, to live and tour in Victoria.



This exciting route is an absolute ripper, offering drivers different road challenges and passengers different magical countryside views at each and every section. The roads are all sealed, they dip and ascend presenting tight, twisty sections with on/off cambers and some bends tightening before their exits, then straightening and gently sweeping along the ridges and valleys. Then slower, tight, cautious sections over a stretch of forested single lane bridges, clearing and quickly climbing again way up high into the beautiful Gippsland peaks with amazing sun-drenched green valley forever views. Sweeping down the ridges into the valley troughs with views way out to Bass Strait and Westernport Bay glistening in the sun, from the Gurdies peaks.

Navigating, we didn’t miss a turn, and for me, the reward was when we had pulled over, idling at a stage intersection, waiting for our group to regather, in my mirrors I could see a mid-pack driver scramble out of his Lotus and run all the way up the convoy to thumbs-up congratulate me on “a cracker of a route”. And his reward – my beaming smile. Definitely a must lock-in repeat EMR this one, if you missed it this time round.



Molloy Beats Stokell

story & photos: Andrew Row



Evan's record breaking Exige



Evan's Exige adding its own lightness by spitting the inner guard out



Cam's Exige

Well the title says it all really. Evan Molloy managed to take the DTC track lap record off Paul Stokell. There is nothing that brings more joy to a Lotus owner than beating Paul, we don't even care if it wasn't a fair fight.

Plenty of excitement in getting the first post-covid track day underway. Even the weather gods were happy to oblige, with a perfect day after the previous day's rain. A little help from the ever-enthusiastic Ken and Pauline Graham soon had the donut clear of puddles for the start of a great day.

With covid rules only allowing 20 at the track for each of the morning and afternoon sessions, we were all in for plenty of runs, the morning session managing 13 runs before lunch. This meant little wait time between runs, but somewhat less socialising as a consequence, and missing the competitive banter of the "7" lads, as they all chose the afternoon session.

Evan led the way all morning, edging closer to the lap record, and then lowering it a couple of times. Gideon and Lindsay chasing hard behind, Lindsay having his share of spins whilst pushing hard in pursuit. Ken and Pauline were ever competitive between themselves. Pauline taking the day by a hundredth of a second. She certainly peddled the Datsun hard, with a bit of a hair-raising spin through turn 1. I shared the Grahams' pain of tyres well past their use by date, time for a new set now track days are back on.

Cam Anderson had his first run at the DTC track in his Exige. After building pace all morning he left with the appropriate grin. I'm sure he will now be another regular.

Thanks to Bridie for coming out and running the timing all morning. Much appreciated by all. Evan kindly took her for a lap in his S1 Exige after the competitive runs were done. She has been hunting for something quicker than her automatic Corolla ever since.



Bridie getting a ride with Evan

CAR	Driver	Make	Best
8	Evan Molloy	Lotus S1 Exige	44.672
10	Gideon Street	2013 Lotus Exige	46.203
7	Lindsay Close	2007 Lotus Exige S	46.254
9	Michael Blessas	Lotus Elise	46.341
15	Jason McGarry	2017 Lotus Exige	46.569
5	Pauline Graham	Datsun 1600 SSS	46.704
14	Ken Graham	Datsun 1600 SSS	46.719
6	Euan McGarry	2017 Lotus Exige	47.312
4	Jeff Graham	Mazda MX5	48.079
1	Andrew Row	2005 Lotus Exige	48.11
11	Pat Richards	Lotus Elise	48.474
17	David Yule	Lotus Elise S	50.369
12	Cam Anderson	2005 Lotus Exige	50.533
13	Peter Quinn	2002 Lotus Elise	50.654
16	Antony van der Drift	1971 Porsche 914	51.936
3	George Row	Lotus Elise	52.166



All the Exiges



Cam lining up for his first DTC





Lakeside DTC

Sunday 21 June – Afternoon session

by Daryl Wilson

photos: Shane Murphy & Steve Lennox

After the Covid 19 lockdown it was good to finally get back to doing what we do and run again at Lakeside Driver Training Centre. Due to the Covid 19 restrictions we had to split our usual all-day event into two half day sessions. As luck would have it, it was a perfect Queensland day with no sign of the rain that had been predicted, and going by the morning session the track was clean, dry and fast.

The "A" team of Gideon Street, Andrew Row, Jason McGarry and Bridie Moran set up for the day and ran the morning session which saw Evan Molloy better Paul Stokell's track record of 44.856 sec with an impressive 44.672 sec run.

In the afternoon it was the turn of the "B" team of Steve Lennox, Shane Murphy and Daryl Wilson to take over and marshal the entrants. After the usual formalities of driver sign-on, scrutineering and driver briefing, it was time for the afternoon group to hit the track and see who was the fastest of the group.

Jon Young (aka Smokin' Jon) got off to a flyer immediately, doing a 48.624 sec run. Jon was closely followed by Mike Jones in his Toyota 86 with a 49.658 sec run. Jon and Shane Murphy both in "7s" battled all day, as they usually do, with Jon being fastest overall in the afternoon group.



Daryl's Seven



Shane's Seven

Another notable performer on the day was Eckhard Schwarting in his Porsche Cayman S, which I believe may have been his first outing in the car. Eckhard slowly whittled his times down over the day from 50.163 sec to his best of 48.926 secs.

The Jones family, all four Holden Sporting Car Club members were there with their 1968 Lotus Europa and 2008 Locost Special. Gwyneth and Cordelia shared the Locost, Gwyneth taking the honours with a best time of 51.214 sec against Cordelia best time of 51.816 sec.

Michael and Lloyd shared the Europa with Lloyd's best run of 55.411 sec to pip Michael's best of 58.486 sec.

Overall most drivers had 12 runs and a good time appeared to be had by all – see best time results opposite.

CAR	Driver	Make	Best
26	Jon Young	Caterham S3	48.083
30	Mike Jones	Toyota 86	48.333
24	Eckhard Schwarting	Porsche Cayman S	48.926
33	Shane Murphy	Lotus Seven	49.131
31	Mal Gray	Lotus Elise	49.244
29	Daryl Wilson	1998 Caterham Super 7	50.259
28	Joshua Luckel	Mazda 2	50.437
23	Gwyneth Jones	Locost Special	51.214
35	Tom Overland	BMW 323	51.717
32	Cordelia Jones	Locost Special	51.816
21	Graham Sorenson	Lotus Cooper Special	52.019
36	Adam Kudra	Renault Megane	52.13
27	Steve Lennox	Lotus Europa	53.088
22	Jonathon Jones	Lotus Europa	54.548
25	Lloyd Jones	Lotus Europa	55.411
34	Michael Jones	Lotus Europa	58.486



Daryl manning the timing



Europas new and old



Goodwood FOS

The perpetual bucket list item

by Vicky Rowe

Goodwood Festival of Speed, or FOS, is an extravaganza of all things fast, held annually in the grounds of Goodwood House, West Sussex, England.

Considered a mecca for car enthusiasts like me, it revels in the history of the automobile, celebrates the trials and triumphs of the past, tantalises with glimpses of the future, whilst also providing a soapbox for present day offerings. But it's not just about cars. It's about anything and everything that goes fast. In July 2018, celebrating its 25th anniversary, it promised to surpass itself in terms of size, splendour, variety and spectacle.

So here I am at last, at my first ever visit to FOS. There's just one BIG problem. I feel nothing. Well not exactly nothing. My head is throbbing, my throat is dry and my nose is running. How can this be?

Overhead the sky is buzzing with a constant stream of helicopters dropping off their privileged guests. Most of the crowd though are converging from the carparks, forming a fast moving stream towards the gates. Everything is orderly and without fuss, but with the summer sun on my head and the push of the crowd I made a bee-line straight to the nearest grandstand for a reprieve and stocktake of my energy reserves. Come on! I've waited a long time to tick this off my bucket list. This is no time to be sitting around.

By luck, rather than by plan, I find I'm sitting directly opposite parc ferme, just as the first group of cars on the program started their procession down the 1.87km Hill Climb course to the start line. Perfect!

Screens appear at every angle from my spot in the grandstand and the informative commentary is crisp and clear. Now history starts flashing by in the form of big beasts from the start of the twentieth century, chugging and gasping, bouncing and heaving, faster than I could believe. Holy guacamole!

Spawning the dawn of motorsport, these 'titans' were built for both speed and endurance, with massive power plants and a mix of mechanical set-ups. In this era there were many small manufacturers rapidly developing and trialling new technologies to showcase, just as has been done in motorsport throughout the years.

Watching on I'm captivated as I imagine them back in their time, charging along unmade and bumpy roads, ploughing through anyone and anything in their path, with grubby faced pilots either unable to see or unable to stop.

Reminding me more of a fire breathing dragon than a motorcar, the Fiat S76 has a remarkable story that's worth recapping. One of two built around 1910, the 'Beast of Turin' was designed to break land speed records with a 28.5 litre, 4 cylinder, monster engine. For a time, it (or one of the cars, at least) was the fastest car in the world, but both cars were lost post-war. That is until a chassis was found in Melbourne, Australia, 15 years ago by classic racing car enthusiast Duncan Pittaway, who transported it back to the UK for a painstaking restoration, matching the chassis with the engine from the other car that had been recovered by Fiat. Thank you, Duncan, for bringing this fire breathing piece of history back to life.

Next up was a broad mix of cars from the 1920s and 1930s. The glory of being the fastest was still high on the agenda, as demonstrated by the 1933 Napier-Railton Special, producing 580bhp from a 23.9 litre W12. But long-distance races, over difficult terrain, required more reliable and lightweight machines.

A Monza-winning Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 of billionaires Martin and Annette Viessman caught my eye next. Maybe it was the pretty red colour, the elegant curves of the flared wheel arches, or Annette's blonde hair, caught in the slipstream as she zoomed past. At last, there's a woman on the track!

I suspect there's quite a few billionaires participating in or enjoying the festival. You don't just complete an entry form and pay your fees to be a part of FOS. You (well, your car really) have to be invited. The Duke of Richmond and his army of merrymakers must be maintaining a database of history-making, event-winning and most notable motor vehicles on the planet. Most here are uber expensive, even priceless, yet here they are. Rather than collecting dust in a museum or garage they're still being used according to their original intent, with serious drivers giving them some welly and willing them up the hill.

It's probably worth explaining here that the FOS Hill Climb is much more than a parade. Other than those considered too fast to be timed (think F1 or superbikes), cars are timed and compete in their relevant classes. The course twists and turns, sometimes without warning, and the afternoon sun can cause havoc as it dapples through the trees or bounces off the flint wall. Just ask the 911 driver who tail-boned the Le Mans Porsche he was following. There's been plenty of incidents here and even a few fatalities during the 25-year history of the course.

Like most that come to FOS, I am truly grateful for the Viessman's of the world, who take care of these treasures and who share them in an honourable fashion. The same gratitude is awarded to the brave drivers who must tackle the course and wrestle the vehicle to the finish line.

I'm not going to talk about every group and class of car driven up the hill. There were over 30 groups, not including the Supercars. But there is one group that I felt a strong affiliation with, partly because I'd just spent a few days retracing the history of Lotus and meeting some interesting characters along the way.

Cars are interesting, but usually it's the people connected to the cars that tell the story which goes well beyond the hardware. Drivers like Juan Manuel Fangio, Stirling Moss, Graham Hill, Bruce McLaren, Jack Brabham and Jim Clark are synonymous with the glamour of the 1950s and 1960s, the dawn of the World Drivers Championship, and the early evolution of Formula 1.

With a focus on speed over safety, and very little research or science to support the provision of safety equipment, drivers often paid the ultimate price for their profession. The very charming and much admired Jim lost his life during a Formula 2 race in 1968, whilst driving a Lotus 48 to fulfil contractual obligations. At the time he had won more grand prix races and pole positions than any other driver. The outpouring of grief across Lotus and the Formula 1 community was immense.

Fifty years on and his loss is still profound. Bob Dance, like others that knew Jim, express a palpable sadness on recalling the tragic event that took his life. Bob was chief mechanic at Team Lotus at the time. Now, well into his 70s, Bob still goes to work every day at Classic Team Lotus, working on and preparing the Lotus 25 for events like FOS. Jim drove the 25 to win 14 Grand Prix races, securing the World Drivers Championship for himself and giving Lotus the Constructors Championship.

I'm excited to see the 25 on the track. But wait, is that a band of tartan on the helmet? Sir Jackie Stewart, Jim's close friend and honorary president of the Jim Clark Trust, is in the Lotus for a run up the hill. This will be one of several ways that FOS will pay homage to Jim this year.

The remaining groups come through, including modern era Formula 1, Porsche, Porsche and more Porsche, Touring cars, Supercars, Superbikes, Rally cars, Lola cars, Drift cars, and the list goes on. Time to pinch myself. The Panadol has kicked in and I'm ready to make the most of this weekend. Let's go see what else is going on.

Hmm, well I may have underestimated how much there is to get through. The high quality and glossy program indicates the festival is spread over the Duke's vast estate, with much of the activity centred around the manor, and the long driveway utilised for the hill climb. More than 600 cars and bikes are featured, including those that will participate in the Forest Rally Stage, situated further up the hill. Two hundred exhibitors are strewn across the paddocks with various displays and experiences, including car manufacturers who will use this festival to release around forty new models. There's also a Future Lab, FOS Air, a sports action arena, a jet pack man, an off-road arena, the Cartier 'Style et Luxe' concours d'elegance, race car simulators, air shows, helicopter rides, and a remarkable amount of activities for the little ones. Yes, this festival is jam packed with something for everyone, but I only have two days. How am I going to see everything?

I spot some little tots with big ear-muffs, broad rimmed hats and ice-creams in hand, soaking up the atmosphere. Even the bigger kids are looking pretty content, entertained by the remote controlled cars and other kid-friendly activities. Anybody would think it's all about them as they get pulled from the crowd to sit in the F1 car, be

tested in the race simulator and meet a race celebrity. Or maybe I'm just jealous.

I jump on the tractor for the bumpy ride to the top. The Forest Rally Stage provides a very different environment to the hill climb, but what better way to feature the rich rallying heritage spanning more than 50 years than on a dusty, unmade track around a forest.

A short section of the stage is visible from the start line. It's an explosion of noise and dust as they take off, especially when it's the Ford Fiesta of Ogier and Evans, currently second on the WRC ladder.

Again I'm in awe of the cars lining up, but it's only when I head back towards the pits that I am completely floored by what I see. It's a static display of cars driven by legends Colin McRae and Richard Burns and there's a clear dominance of iconic blue and yellow.

A timeline of their careers is represented through these cars, punctuated by remarkable achievements. They were both rivals and friends and hugely popular, especially in the 1990s. McRae was handed the mantle by his father—a very accomplished UK rally driver in his own right. He was very talented, but only ever knew one speed—fast. Nonetheless he was competitive and very successful. Burns was also very talented, but he was more conservative, with much of his success attributed to his tactical approach. They were born within a few years of each other and both died in their 30s, neither from their chosen profession, but rather ironically McRae from a tragic helicopter accident and Burns from a brain tumour. If only they were still here now, fighting it out against each other, as they did on the hill back in 1999.

Time for some fun! Back down the hill in the Supercar paddock and there's a joyful chant I can hear, getting faster and louder until cresting into a cheer. It's the boys blazoned in their Ferrari red uniforms, teasing the crowd with their merchandise. Everyone joins in (they really know how to work the crowd). I want to capture the mood with a photo, so I politely ask if they can pose in front of the car. Like a strong lead in a dance I'm thrown into the roaring pack. No selfie function on this camera, so I give it to someone in the crowd, clearly amused by my predicament. Ahh, but then they realise I'm wearing a Lotus T-shirt. Oops!

I was determined to find the most beautiful car. So many impress. The latest Rolls 'Dawn Black' has a strong presence, the interior



Sir Jackie with Bob Dance

of the Pagani Huayra is beautifully detailed, and the paint finish on the Italdesign Zeruono is stunning. Can I possibly take a photo that will do justice? Then I find her. With spaceship interior and numerous folds and angles that catch the light, this very exclusive and super expensive Apollo Intensa Emozione is the most stunning car I've ever seen. With only ten being produced, this may be the only time I'll ever see one in person. So I'm gonna take my time and take home some pics. They definitely won't do her justice, but they'll be enough to remind me of this special rendezvous.

Oh no, I'm out of time! The festival is closing and I'm being dragged out the gate. Despite my head cold I've excitedly explored the festival over the past two days, yet there's still things in the program I haven't been able to get to. Perhaps it's just not possible to see and experience everything on offer in this timeframe.

I don't want to make this mistake again. When next I go (words uttered by everyone who attends, I'm sure) I'll do more research and make a hit list of "must see and do", I'll be well rested (no more head colds), and I'll have tickets for the entire four-day weekend, with roving grandstand access. The first thing I'll do on arrival is pick up a program, including the earpiece for roving commentary.

Thursday will be the day to get through all the exhibitors, buy some merchandise, see all the new model releases, and the line to the drift car and 4X4 experiences should be empty. On Friday I'll take in some rally action, time a visit to the hill climb finish line for when the fast entrants are running, visit FOS Air, the Supercar paddock, concours de elegance and other static displays. Saturday will be focused on pit lane and the main paddock, in amongst catching the hill climb action. Following the progress of the competition will help to set a plan for Sunday, whilst squeezing in every last drop of FOS.

It's an elixir, a healer, a protector, a cure for head colds. But be warned—it's also terribly and inescapably addictive. See you there!



THE EUROPA MANN

PART 17



by Richard Mann

When you are a t nut like me, you gather (hoard?) information on each and every car you come across. Late last century, after I purchased my 1970 (is that mid-century?) Lotus Europa S2, I joined the Victorian division of Club Lotus Australia, and at some point became secretary. I was handed a box of books, which was the official Club Library, and amongst its contents, were a pile of scrap pieces of paper with notes on various cars and their ownership.

At the time I was working for Kenworth Trucks, and I think it was around 1993 that everyone got their very own desktop computer. Exciting times! I diligently typed all the car ownership details into a thing called a "spreadsheet". The software was called Lotus 1-2-3. In my Europa worktab, the first two entries were for the Type 46. The first car listed was 460602, which was owned by Paul Wilkinson in South Australia, and then 460603. This second car had previously been owned by fellow club member Eric Mills. In the *Lotus Notes* June issue you will have seen Eric driving that car.

Fast forward into the next century. It's August 2019, and Krishnan rings me.

KP: "Have you seen the Europa for sale? It was just posted on Facebook"

RM: "No. Send me the link"

KP: "Will do"

I check the Facebook page and see a trailer and ute piled high with a Silver Europa.

RM: "Thanks for the link. I checked it out. I know the seller. It's that dodgy dealer in South Australia that sold me my red Porka"

KP: "Wad ya think?"

RM: "It's a project, that's for sure. Why? Are you interested in a Europa?"

KP: "Yes. Can you take a good look at the pics and give me your assessment?"

RM: "Rightio. I'll get back to you"

Later that day....

RM: "It's pretty hard to tell, but it must be an early S2, cos it doesn't have warts on the nose, and it has S1 style door handles. I've seen an S2 like that years ago in Richmond"

KP: "So wad ya REALLY think?"

RM: "Dunno. Try and get more photos"

KP: "OK. I got these from the dodgy dealer. Wad ya think?"

RM: "Crikey! Maaaaate! That's not an S2, it's an S1! Rare as hen's teeth. I've been wondering where that car was for the last 30 odd years, and you've found it! Amazing! "

KP: "Do you want to buy it? Should I buy it? Should WE buy it?"

RM: "YES and NO!"



Teaser photo from Facebook



Hmmm... needs work

I ring the dodgy dealer (DD).
I'm playing bad cop.

RM: "It's a load of rubbish, the last car in bits like that sold for the price of a pack of Winny blues. Ya dreamin!"

DD: "These cars are really rare and blah blah blah"

RM: "Sorry you're asking too much. Have a nice day!"

I relay the info to KP.

About 5 minutes pass and the phone rings.

KP: "WE just bought it for a knock down price!"

RM: "Luckily you know a bloke with a very big shed!"

Needless to say, a road trip was organised, and the silver bullet whisked back to Melbourne. The S1 Europa is one of only two brought into Australia by Geoghegans, so that makes it the very first Europa to land in Australia. It featured on the cover of *Sports Car World* magazine, October 1968 edition. Geoghegans ran a full-page ad for the "Lotus Europa". It features the car we have purchased. In the ad they used a bit of trickery. ALL production S1 Europas were LH drive, and both the cars in that magazine can be seen to have a steering wheel on the LH side. Interestingly the interior is photographed in one car, and it appears to be RH drive. However a close inspection of the gauges show the needles sitting at the 5 o'clock position, not the expected 7 o'clock position, So they must have flipped the negative in a few of the photos. Cheeky! Chapman would have approved.

Digging through the boxes of parts that came with the car, we find recent receipts to Paul Wilkinson. So my records dating back to the 1980s confirm the car has been in Paul's hands for well over 30 years.

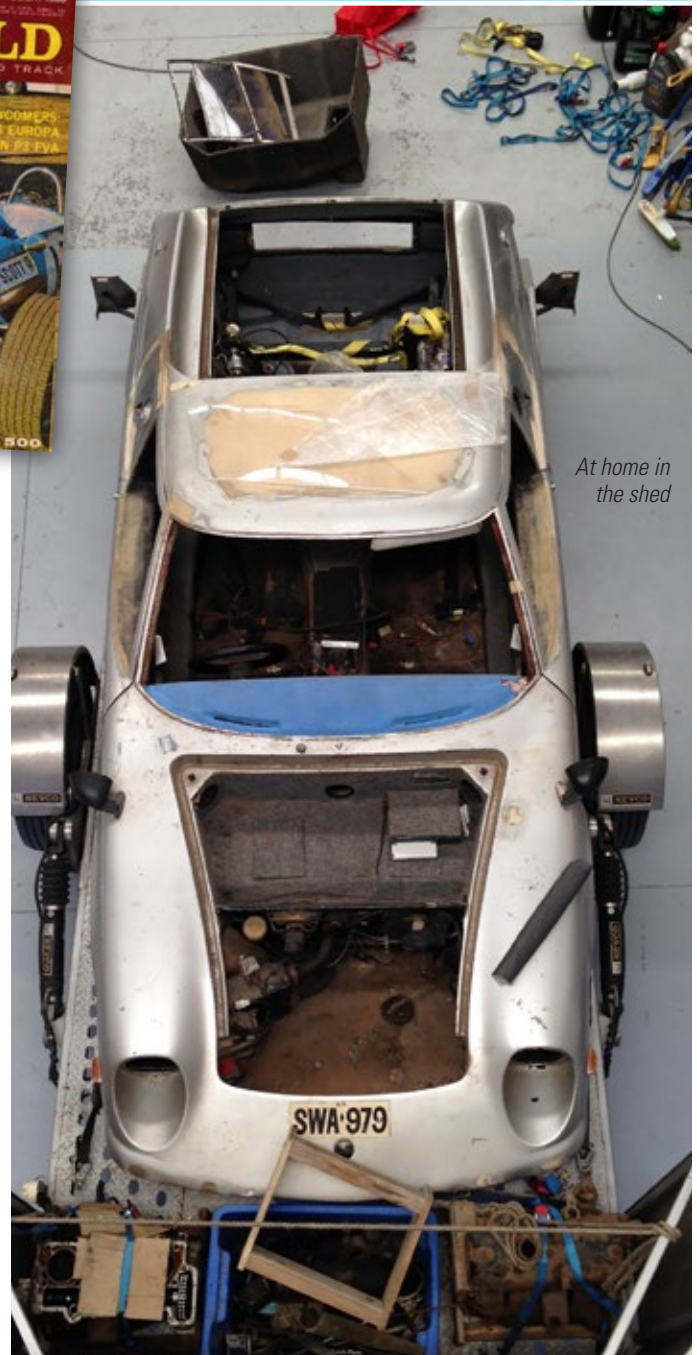
Paul had run the car with a cross flow engine and started to develop a more powerful version. An original non-cross flow also came with the car, and a Geoghegan single side draft intake system. While the S1 is not exactly the most powerful of cars, it is very light. Its interior is totally different to an S2. The seats are simply cushions fitted into moulded recess in the firewall. The side windows are lightweight clip-in affairs made of Perspex. No carpet on the centre tunnel or firewall. No doors trims. The S2 had power windows and steel framed seats, so it was something like 50kg heavier than the S1. The S2 has unsightly vertical sills below the doors, full of pop rivets. The S1 has a clean smooth sill, and different floor level compared to an S2, so it will sit closer to the road, and look mighty racy on its 4.5" rims!

A bewildering number of additional non-S1 parts were sorted and sifted, and sold on eBay to offset the purchase cost. The body work is amazingly straight, but had non-standard air intakes on the sides (like a Lotus 47), and the roof had been filled in after removing a sunroof. The chassis of the S1 is sandwiched between the upper and lower halves of the body shell. With the car living in Adelaide for most of its life, we are lucky the chassis is not rusted. It does have a few minor areas of damage that are easy to repair. Removing the chassis is a monster job, requiring the top and bottom halves of the car to be separated. Thankfully this is not required. Phew!

Having already experienced the joy of Elan ownership, Leo is now ready to take on a larger project, Australia's very first Lotus Europa! One thing is for sure, working on a Europa will certainly make you "spit the dummy".



S1 makes front page news



At home in the shed



Leo assessing the project



Mathilde

The story of how not to restore a 1902 Dutch barge

by Matthew Arnold

CHAPTER 5: BUILDING A WHEELHOUSE

Dear Readers...

After many years of work on Mathilde, we had stopped water going in, made it go forwards and backwards, and turn left and right. All during this time, the epicentre of the barge, the wheelhouse, was a basic structure of plywood and a rickety door that did nothing more than keep the rain out and provide security against only the most inept and lazy burglar. Also, it had no windows, which was a bit of an issue.

So time to build something a bit more permanent and functional. The roof itself and the lower wall sections were already made out of steel so all that was needed was some windows and doors to fill in the gap. Pretty simple except for one thing. Dear Readers, in our region of the Canal de Midi there is a collection of some of the lowest bridges in France. This meant that if we wanted to travel more than 5 kilometres we needed to be able to pass under these low, narrow bridges, many of them no more than 2.5 metres above the water. Given our wheelhouse was about 3 metres high we had a bit of a problem.

So how to resolve this dilemma?

Option 1 was to lower the barge down into the water. But after a bit of calculation I worked out, with the help of someone?, that would require putting about 50 tonnes of ballast into the bilges, which wasn't appealing.

Option 2, which most owners adopted, was to make a collapsible wheelhouse, where you dismantle the whole wheelhouse structure before going through a bridge and then put it back together afterwards. But, frankly, they all leaked and were never really weatherproof. Also, we had the small detail of a solid steel roof that had already been built.

Option 3 was to design and make a system so the whole steel roof and wooden window and door structures would fold out and down and then raise back up again without having to play Bob the Builder upon every bridge approach. Definitely much more complicated and never done before.

So that is what we did! How hard could it be?

The basic idea was the windows would hang off the steel roof on hinges so when you released the securing pins they would fan out and slide down past the steel walls. Sort of like an umbrella in reverse. Then as you raised the roof back to full height the reverse would happen. The rear doors were two french doors that opened out, but also were hinged in the middle so they too would collapse down. Easy, non?

The first issue was how to raise and lower a 700 kg steel roof. After contemplating gears, cogs and hydraulics I decided on electric rams. We sourced four electric rams that were strong enough to lift the roof, and built a steel guide system to keep everything aligned in three directions. Initial testing quickly showed that when you are trying to lift 700 kg of steel perfectly level true, friction is your big enemy. After bending several guides and shearing the cogs off a few rams we got there.

During this process we identified a small but important oversight. With the roof fully down there was a 6 inch gap from which to see out of, assuming you had already had the foresight to drop down to the kneeling position.



Hmm, what to do? When in doubt bring out the oxy-acetylene torch and cut something up. So out it came and a hatch was cut in the roof to allow the pilot to poke his head out of the lowered roof upon approaching a bridge. Important note, Dear Readers: It is very important to remember to duck down just before you go under a bridge otherwise your cruising day will come to an abrupt and unhappy end.

So with the roof successfully raising and lowering and the roof hatch made, it was time to install windows. Of course standard ready-made windows were never an option and, after getting some quotes from bespoke window makers, I quickly resolved to make them myself.

Had I made window frames before I hear you ask? Well no, but how hard could it be? Well pretty bloody tricky in hindsight. For starters, they had to be strong enough to hinge from the top to allow the roof to lower. Then each one had to be sized differently because, as I have mentioned before, nothing on a barge is straight. And, finally, getting good quality wood in Southern France proved to be quite tricky.

After much rooting around I found a good woodyard in Avignon, a beautiful historic French city teeming with history, and the birthplace of the two-fingered salute. A quick detour, Dear Readers. Apparently in the battle of Avignon between the French and the English, the French vowed to cut off the fingers of the English archers when they captured them. Upon victory the Poms apparently raised their two bowing fingers to the French and an invaluable communication tool was invented.

But back to the story. In addition to lots of beautiful architecture and history the city was also designed with the most convoluted road system in the world. Trying to navigate its one way systems, flyovers and tunnels in a van and trailer with a 4-metre length of wood hanging off the back is not in my top ten favourite driving experiences.

Having arrived back with my wood another omission presented itself. I had no saw bench, no planer, no router, no chisels and no idea. Very fortunately there was a local artisan who liked emptying wine barrels more than making them so a deal was struck – booze and cash for machines and advice. And off I went.

Actually, as a rank beginner I was pretty pleased with my efforts, though after making the frames it was sort of obvious they were on the flimsy and wonky side. However, this was after a month of work and having now realised that the quotes I got from professional window framers were not that outrageous after all, but I was not about to start again.

A local glazier provided all the glass and after another month of fettling and fiddling we were all glazed up and ready for our first test run.



Metal guides and rams being fitted



Roof hatch



It started off very well. The sun was shining. We approached our first bridge, hit the 'lower down slowly and evenly' switch and, hey presto, down the roof went with all the windows sliding smoothly down. Then back up again. "Well done, Matt" I said to myself.

We progressed on. Mrs A and the Mother-in-Law were sitting on the back terrace all smiles, relaxing and sipping cool G&T's.

You know, Dear Readers, that something is about to occur don't you? Well you're right. I will keep you in suspenders no longer.

As you may have learned from various lifestyle holiday TV programmes or glossy magazines, the French canals are lined with trees and they often overhang the canal. It is a common thing to have them brush over the barge as you pass by.

So along we go and this overhanging tree approaches. "No problem" I thought from a distance. But then as we are just in front of it hidden amongst the small flexible branches is this big old dead limb shaped exactly like a ripper blade and just as rigid. And it was at the exact height of the wheelhouse. Merde! Full reverse did nothing, swinging the wheel only made it worse. Then in slow motion I watched this limb dig into the front window and then as we passed by tore apart the entire side of the wheelhouse with wood and glass flying everywhere and Mrs A and the Mother-in-Law diving for cover. It was carnage. Two months' work destroyed in 10 seconds. Fortunately, no one was hurt. I did, however, have the time to note just how fast an arthritic 70-year-old mother-in-law can move when the need calls.

No one really said anything. We all just surveyed the scene of destruction and then as I headed off again with a renewed respect for trees the others started to load the last two months of work into rubbish bins.

Upon arriving back at our berth a neighbour commented "Yes it's best to try and avoid the trees". I didn't reply.

In retrospect, Dear Readers, it wasn't all bad. The initial frames I made were too small and I still had half a shed of timber left so, fairly quickly afterward, Mathilde was reframed and glazed, this time with laminated glass.

I since learned that destroying wheelhouses is a bit of a right of passage. All of the experienced barge owners have all destroyed their wheelhouses at least once on bridges or trees or, in one unlucky case, by a digger parked on the bank doing an over-enthusiastic rotation.

So next month, Dear Readers, we will adventure to the land of poo and how to get rid of it on a barge.

Until then, happy motoring.





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