

The Chapman Report



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December 2006 -
January 2007

Transitions

New Years Eve, the chequered flag becomes the next green flag. I like to think of these as transitions rather than the end. Lots of good car events, but lots of local and international upheaval, also. Lets hope for some resolution, some decisions, and a safer world for so many people that are just trying to feed, cloth and house their family, in the coming year.



The starting point, an Elise frame

January Meeting

Friday, January 19th, 7:30 pm

Host: Tom and Cherrie Carney

Track Day *John Zender*

The Golden Gate Lotus Club is staging its first track day of 2007 at Laguna Seca on January 2. Early bird price is only 195 for members and 215 for non-members.

Go to www.motorsportreg.com to view the details.

Lotus 119a For Sale, Only £10!

Well, the diecast model of this soapbox racer. Lotus, along with other car manufacturers, made 'one-off' soapbox racers for the '06 Goodwood Festival of Speed. Some of these were on display at the Pebble Beach Concours. I'll have to get one, a belated Christmas gift to myself!



Calendar

- December 9 Xmas Party
Capelli's
- December 25 Santa puts a turbo in all members' stockings
- January 2 Track Day at Laguna
- January 12 - 14 Roadster Show
Cow Palace
- January 19th Membership Meetin
Host Tom & Charrie

for more and up to date information these GGLC and other events check the GGLC website at www.gglotus.org

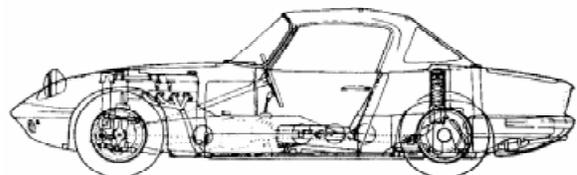
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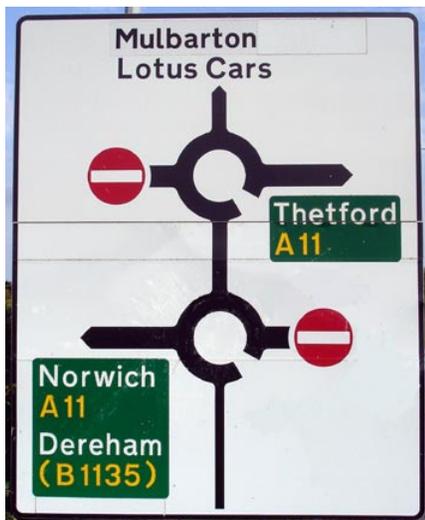


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Lotus Factory Tour *by Jon McBeth*



While in the UK to attend the Goodwood Revival (another story), I figured a good side trip would be up to Hethel for a factory tour. Tours are arranged in advance, Wednesdays only, reserved by e-mail via the Group Lotus website. Tour groups are kept small enough to be manageable, in this case about 8 or 10 people. They charge 20 pounds for the tour, when the reservation is made, I guess to insure that you will actually show up. The factory is a day's drive north from where I was staying in Southampton, past London to Norfolk. Hethel is about 30 minutes south, on the A11 motorway, from the city of Norwich. Overnight accommodation is available in the nearby town of Wymondham where there are several Inns or bed and breakfast Pubs.

As far as I could tell, there is no town or village of Hethel! Hethel is merely a crossroads and the name of the abandoned WWII airfield that Colin Chapman chose for the relocation of his factory. The cornerstone, dated 1966, is on display in the Gift Shop. Incorporating the airstrip (Colin was a pilot and used to fly in and out) is the Test Track. The Lotus factory is surrounded by farmland, in the middle of "nowhere" but there are signs "Lotus Cars" at the motorway exits. Cameras are strictly forbidden by factory Security and they are temporarily confiscated along with cell

phones capable of taking pictures at the gate.

The tour forms up at the aforementioned Gift Shop where there is also a display of the high tech Lotus "soapbox" racers dominant in gravity races. The original factory building appeared to be offices now and our tour group was led to and through a separate big metal building where Elises and other related models are assembled. What we saw was not an obvious assembly line but rather a series of stations where components are put together. The assemblies are pushed from station to station on wheeled dollies.

At the first stop we saw bins full of fiberglass sections (nose, doors etc.) which are put on jigs and bonded to inner panels with epoxy. These panels are very light and flexible and become somewhat structural only after being bonded together. Our guide explained that the panels, actually GRP (glass reinforced plastic), manufactured in France, are injection molded and not "laid up" fiberglass. However, the Exige, I read, is laid up by hand. The mention of French manufacture produced groans from the tour members but emphasis was made that all design and engineering is strictly British. Our guide also mentioned somewhat meekly that some of the denser (stiffer) type panels are made in Malaysia. Proton is of course Malaysian, our guide emphasizing that "our paychecks come from Proton" making a Malaysian connection.

We then proceeded to the paint shop. All the panels needed for a complete car which have been checked for fit and gap tolerance are mounted on a rolling rack which follows a track into the paint booth. We were told that the color coat is water based and sprayed by hand (no robots or tanks at Lotus). Seven point something liters of DuPont paint are allotted to each Elise, which gives the mil thickness required. DuPont engineers worked out the paint formula with Lotus. The clear coat is lacquer based. All the painted panels

are kept together and identified with numbers on masking tape so that the panels will match in color on the car. At this point we were shown the build sheet which accompanies each car through the assembly process. Every Lotus is custom built to order, we were told. The future owners name is on the build sheet which lists the color and options specified for that particular car. Of course, if you buy an Elise off a dealer's lot, and had not ordered one with the options you want, then the dealer has ordered that car with the options he thought would be most saleable. To the factory, they are all custom orders.

We then saw chassis being put together. Precut extruded aluminum sections were being bonded to each other with epoxy. Our guide said that this was current aircraft technology pioneered in the auto industry by Lotus. She also stated that this was way beyond anything Colin Chapman would have been capable of. Hey, I thought, wasn't he a qualified stress engineer with connections to the aluminum and aerospace industries? The implication was that in Chapman's time the cars were not engineered or innovative in the way they are now, but those qualities exactly were what made Lotus what it was (and is), I was thinking. I objected but kept my thoughts to myself. To be fair, maybe she only meant that the new guard had progressed beyond the old guard. Well yeah, but the attitude seemed wrong somehow. Here we saw that Elises, and Europas were being built side by side. The chassis differences were discernable and the awaiting body panels were of course different. The build sheets kept it all straight. We were informed that Europas were not to be going to America. A few body panels are bonded to the chassis but most are bolted on. In the case of damage, panels can be replaced. I asked what happens if the bonded aluminum frame is bent in an accident. The guide said in that case, it's a write-off (the car is totaled). She said that there have been instances of chassis sections being sent to body shops, but that is cost prohibitive and very rare.

Next, engines were installed in the completed chassis. Different completely assembled engines were sitting around in crates fresh from Toyota or Vauxhall (?). As an aside our guide pointed out that we might see parts marked Yamaha on Toyota engines. The assembly team at each station is timed. The current time allowed for the engine installation is around 50 minutes.

At the following stations the cars were plumbed, accessories put on, brakes installed, and interiors fitted out. At the next to last stop, fluids were put in (I think it was 6 liters of gas), the cars started and driven into a cell where the engine management system was configured and checked. We could see the monitor showing the configuring steps while the car was hooked to a long coiled connecting cord. The technician was working a hand held keyboard of some sort and the monitor showed items on/off, enabled/disabled and such. The guide said that while the engines were standard units from the manufacturer, the performance parameter programming was proprietary to Lotus. Then we were led out the roll-up door to where completed cars were parked. We were told that production varies according to demand but that the factory has not been at peak production quantity so far. Peak capacity, in the present plant configuration would be 10,000 cars per year, we were told.

Several of us noticed, in the distance, an 80's Camel Team Lotus Formula 1 car parked on the track apron. Apparently we had missed the sight and sound of a test run. Classic Team Lotus is located on the factory grounds but is not affiliated with the factory. Someone asked if there was a museum, but the guide said no, all items of historical interest had been sold off during the various changes of Lotus ownership. A shame, but then maybe that's the only way some things got saved, wherever they may be. The tour had taken about two hours and ended up back at the Gift Shop. A shopping opportunity. One guy bought a hat, others, myself included, picked up free brochures.

end

Holiday Dinner and December Meeting *editor*

Capellinis is a very nice venue for the party. Excellent Italian food that got the nod from my wife(New York-Italian), who is very picky.

The club had been concerned that the turnout would be low but it looked like we just about filled the room. Lots of old and new faces.

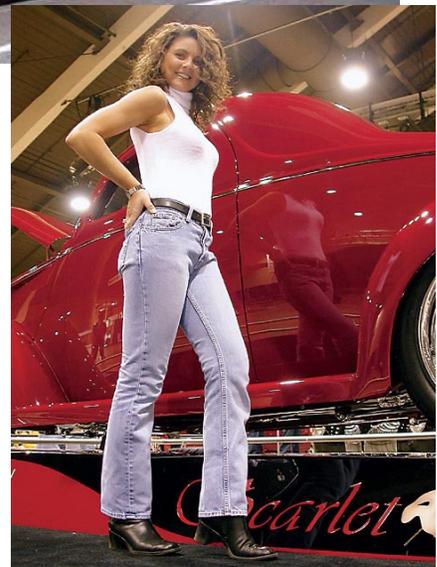
The new President, Clark Vinyard, was sworn in, knowing little of the bad luck that has beset so many past presidents. I won't go into the details, just to painful to remember.

The Old Oakland Roadster Show *editor*

OK, now at the Cow Palace, but these are still the most beautiful automotive works of art on the earth. The long hours of craftsmanship that have been put into the cars is evident. You've got to see this show!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Yes, there are many nice sites at the show, so be there. January 12th through 14th. I'm going to escort some of my autoshop students there on Saturday, so I hope to see some of the club members there, also.





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Lotus Bytes/Ebay Watch: *editor*



Tesla progress? I don't know. I've heard that they have presold over 230 with full price deposits, but I'd like to know if production has started and what changes have been made from their prototypes. Some of their job openings are in Taiwan, so what do they plan to do there?

There was a story on PBS about the problems that still exist with lithium-ion battery technology. I'd like to know if there is an assembly line now in place for the '07 models.

In for a challenging restoration? The Elan +2, below is for sale on Ebay. LOL

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The Chapman Report is published monthly by the Golden Gate Lotus Club, PO Box 117303, Burlingame, CA 94011. The GGLC is a non-profit incorporated car club and is not affiliated with Group Lotus, Team Lotus or Lotus Cars USA. The GGLC's annual membership dues are \$25.00.

Opinions expressed in the Chapman Report are those of the authors and do not represent those of the GGLC or its officers.

Submissions to the Chapman Report are accepted and encouraged. Please email them to chapmanreport@gglotus.org in MS Word, rtf or ASCII text. Submissions may also be mailed to Jim McClure, 11238 Bubb Road, Cupertino, CA 95014.

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Classifieds

(non-commercial ads are free to GGLC members and will run for three issues before requiring renewal)

FOR SALE: 1966 Lotus Elan Coupe. Color BRG. Webers and Knock off wheels. Engine, Transmission and brakes rebuilt, with less than 2000 miles. Has +2 wheels and flared wheel wells. Body has usual F/G checking but looks and drives great. Ca black plate car, no rust. \$15000 925 484 1697

(11/06)

For Sale: ???????? (1/07)

Answers for last month's photos:

First: Front wheel of the Honda six cylinder 125cc GP bike.

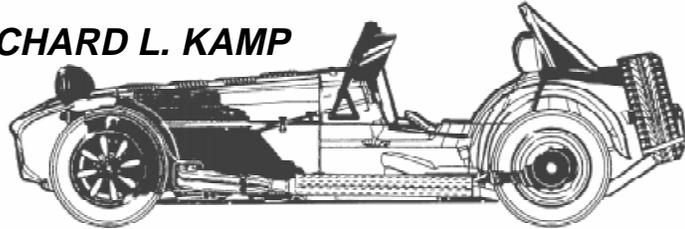
Second: The 'Manx' motor on a Norton 500cc Manxman motorcycle and an Isle of Man TT winner.

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For Sale: EMAIL jim mcclure, hornetconsulting@yahoo.com (1/07)

For Sale: 1970 Elan +2. Twin Cam, 40DCOE carbs, Knock Off Wheels. Has not run in several years, but was running when put away. Significant spare parts included. Ken Dusenberry <kadmad@swcp.com> (12/06)

FOR SALE: '69 S4 fixed head. please feel free to call me a 805-559-7772. thanks, david (9/06)

FOR SALE: 2005 Elise. Silver,Tan. 2000 miles, Sport&Touring. Argray exhaust \$40,000. Paul Camusi 530-343-0443 (10/06)

Parts Wanted: Front and rear suspension parts for 1989 Esprit. I need all of the hard bits except for the rear upper suspension links. Contact Mike Griese (mike.griese@att.net). (10/06)

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