



been pretty liberal in recent years, but the loopholes are now being tightened up and hopefully this will have the effect of equalising competition a little.

The Elan was designated the Lotus 26 and while the standard car was a tremendous performer, the 26R racing version was the real winner with its lighter weight, bigger tyres, stiffer chassis and tweaked engine. It is the homologated specification of the 26R upon which all today's front-running rallying/racing Elans are based. The cost can be a little off-putting. Paul Howcroft reckons that his car has seen off a cool £50,000 which includes a lot of development work, so a replica of his current car could probably be put together by Autostorica for nearer £35,000: still a lot for a small glassfibre car, albeit a very competitive one.

Few Elans were rallied when new; the first reference I could find to an Elan on an international rally was the '64 Tulip, and the odd one crops up thereafter. However, its home was primarily the smooth race track. That was mainly because the nature of the suspension design made it a particularly effective performer on smooth tarmac, on which surface its limited ground clearance didn't matter too much. Also there was the inescapable fact that the Elan was a delicate, precisely engineered car that didn't like being bumped and jumped too much. There seems little doubt that the Elan could have been made into a successful rally car more than 20 years ago but Lotus didn't have the resources to do it; besides which, Colin Chapman was exclusively racing orientated. No-one else was brave enough to attempt it.

