



LOTUS ELITE

An Appreciation and an Obituary

AFTER SIX YEARS of production, the Lotus Elite is no more. Gone it is, the way of the Allard J-2, the L-29 Cord, the Mercedes SS-K and other designs of sacred memory.

A beautiful design was the Elite, one of the great designs of the post WW-II era, one that seems certain to be looked back upon as a landmark of some sort in automobile design. Without question, it was one of the best, if not the very best looking Grand Touring car ever built. The body, all fiberglass, was designed entirely in the Lotus works at Luton, England, and was not only an immediate and lasting success but also an example, perhaps the only example, of the fluid plasticity of speed/motion to be captured in that glass fiber and resin medium.

Admittedly, the Elite had its problems. The monocoque-type construction created a drumming that was extremely annoying to most passengers, the body had minimal (if that) protection from the expected hazards of normal driving, and the average mechanic went into shock when asked to work on it.

The car was also plagued by other problems—a high initial price that scared off all but the most sanguine, a marketing situation during its introduction that could only be described as impossible, and a long period (before Bob Challman of Ecurie Shirlee Corp. stepped in to give the American Lotus plan a respectability and dependability it never had before) when the buyer of an Elite didn't know whether he'd ever see his dealer again.

So, think well of the Elite. It will be remembered as one of the outstanding designs.