



CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION



The Elan – How Many?

A year ago in the January 2014 edition of Club Lotus News we looked at how many +2 Elans were built. It is now the turn of the Elan. Again we are faced with the fact that there will never be a definitive answer to this, though we have done our best. Apart from the disregard for future historians, perhaps forgivable given the tight business environment of the 1960s, Lotus had what would now be considered a somewhat cavalier attitude to record keeping, certainly in the earlier days before the move to Hethel and the company's listing on the Stock Exchange.

At the risk of repetition, we need first to look at the way in which Lotus allocated unit numbers. The first iteration of the Elan was known as the Elan 1600 (in fact the Elan 1500 on introduction but that soon changed; only 8 production Elans, plus the 3 prototypes, were fitted with the 1500 engine). However, for convenience we now refer to it as the S1. Incidentally, many people forget that the S stands for Series. Thereafter, of course, we know that the Elan progressed through an additional

four series, ending with the Sprint. The first point of difficulty arises here because the actual change over date for the introduction of each series and each type is often cloudy, as we shall find.

Again, at the risk of repeating ourselves, we must consider how Lotus allocated Unit, or VIN, numbers. As an aside, early Elans were allocated additional separate chassis and body numbers. These were annotated in the records up until early 1966, but not thereafter, though subsequent body numbers can be found crayoned into the underside of body panels. VIN numbers began with 26/0001; that is the Lotus Type number followed by the Unit number. At 26/0049 there was a mighty leap, with an addition of 3000 apparent units, such that the very next car off the production line was 26/3050! (See below for more on this extra 3000). All subsequent Elans were numbered in order up until unit no. 45/9832 at the end of December 1969. So on the face of it, it appears that 9,832 Elans were made up until this date. However, it will be seen that we clearly have to deduct the 3000 'out of nowhere' numbers to get a fix of **6,832** Elans of all types built to end 1969.

It is entirely possible that a few unit numbers were not allocated, but we just don't know. It is sometimes alleged that Lotus carried out certain operations to avoid paying tax, or that some cars became 'grey' and disappeared from the production run to be finished off by factory workers at the weekend. There may well have been some incidents like this, but I believe we must bear in mind that with the telling of the stories tends to come exaggeration, so that folk begin to feel that this sort of thing went on all the time. We suspect that it did not and we are probably merely talking of a small number of cars. In addition, after the move to Hethel it is our contention that Lotus began to get its act together in the run up to becoming a public company, so underhand goings on were less likely.

What we shall never be able to pin down are the specific change over dates from one series to another. Although Lotus give indications in the Workshop Manual and Parts List, there are known examples of Series that fall outside of those numbers. In addition, we have what have come to be called the Series 1 ½ Elans, which combined some, but not all of the S2 changes. The changeover date to S3 is especially tricky, since the Type 36 FHC applied to some S2 cars. The S2 and S3 Coupes (FHC) were made together for nearly a year between September 1965 and June 1966. From VINs 4510 to 5810 the new Coupes were allocated the next chassis number as they came off the production line, irrespective of being a S2 or a S3. So for example 5411 could be a S2 and 5412 a S3. Although this doesn't affect the overall totals, that's an overlap of 1300 cars. We estimate that somewhere in the region of 30% to 40% were S3 Coupes, so perhaps between 390 and 520 of these overlap cars. Then there were the Super Safety S3 Elans, introduced toward the end of their run, mostly for the Federal market; remember Ralph Nader? Well, he's to blame! The S3 SS, which had its own official badge, incorporated a number of S4 features, before the S4 was introduced. The Parts List gives VINs 7400 to 7894 as SS versions, though we know that some earlier cars, such as 7279 had SS features. And it's only after years of sleuthing that we have managed to pin down, reasonably accurately, the change over from S4 to Sprint by VIN.

So all in all it's impossible to say how many pre-1970 Elans were destined for the Domestic or Export or Federal market with any degree of accuracy. It's similarly impossible to number the total DHC or FHC Elans. However, we know you would like us to have a stab at some sort of breakdown, if only for curiosity's sake! So we shall take the Lotus VINs in the Parts List as our guideline.

Series	To VIN	Total
Elan 1600 or S1	3899	899 (deduct the 3000)

Elan S2	5810	1911
Elan S3	7894	2084
Elan S4	9832	1938
TOTAL		6832

Don't ask how many 26Rs were *officially* built by Lotus! Their figure is included in the S1 and S2 totals above. Guaranteed to get the pundits agitated! As are questions such as what was the VIN of the final pre-airflow FHC? What car had the first Stromberg carburettors fitted? We just don't know and neither does Lotus.

From 1 January 1970 Lotus revised the way in which unit numbers were allocated. The format became 7004080030C. This breaks down as 70 – Year of manufacture; 04 – Month of manufacture; 08 – Batch number; 0030 – Unit number; C – Letter to denote Elan type, C being the standard S4 DHC for the domestic UK market. From 1 January 1972 the batch number was dropped, so the format became, for example 72060710G.

We now have to look at how many of each Type of Elan were made from 1 January 1970 to end of Elan production in March 1973. Fortunately we have that data and, since there were 11 Types, it is best to present the figures in tabular form:

Type Letter	Number Made	Elan S4
A	95	Standard Domestic FHC
B	5	Standard Export FHC
C	128	Standard Domestic DHC
D	3	Standard Export DHC
E	665	SE later Sprint Domestic FHC
F	86	SE later Sprint Export FHC
G	899	SE later Sprint Domestic DHC
H	103	SE later Sprint Export DHC
J	70	SE later Sprint Federal FHC
K	319	SE later Sprint Federal DHC
TOTAL	2373	

So we now have two total production runs of Elan Types, to add together (6,832 and 2,373), giving us a total of **9,205** Elans built between 1963 and 1973. That is an average of 77 Elans a month!

If we look at our friends Robinshaw and Ross' book on the Elan and Plus 2, there are a variety of total production figures. They quote a LDC leaflet total of 12,224; this is a figure also given in the Bolster book. Harvey gives us a figure of 8,650; Nye and Ward say 'some 12,200'. Robinshaw and Ross end up concluding that between 8,676 and 9,153 Elans were built in total; they weren't far off!

How do we account for the leap in VINs by 3000 then? We probably need to look at the start of the Elan's racing career in the hands of Ian Walker and Graham Warner and the subsequent introduction of the 26R. Lotus were required to homologate the car for competition use with the RAC and FIA. At the time the rules required that a minimum number of standard cars had already been manufactured. If we look at the production figures it doesn't take long to realise that Lotus was such a small volume producer and so the chances of having made the full complement of cars required

for homologation were slim. The substitution of a figure 3 for the 0 as the first number for each unit would have given the impression that actually many more cars had been made. Although we now know this was done from unit 26/3050, cars carried on coming off the production line with VINs indicating 26/0100, 26/0200 and so on for a while. The point at which that was changed by the factory and the 3 substituted for the first 0 on the actual VIN plate is not known.

So to round off this look at production numbers, it might be interesting to total all Elans and all Plus 2s made to get a total production figure for the 1963 to 1974 period. We concluded that 5,244 Plus 2s of all varieties were made; add that to the 9,205 Elans built and our grand total is 14,449. Anyone want to guess how many still exist?

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