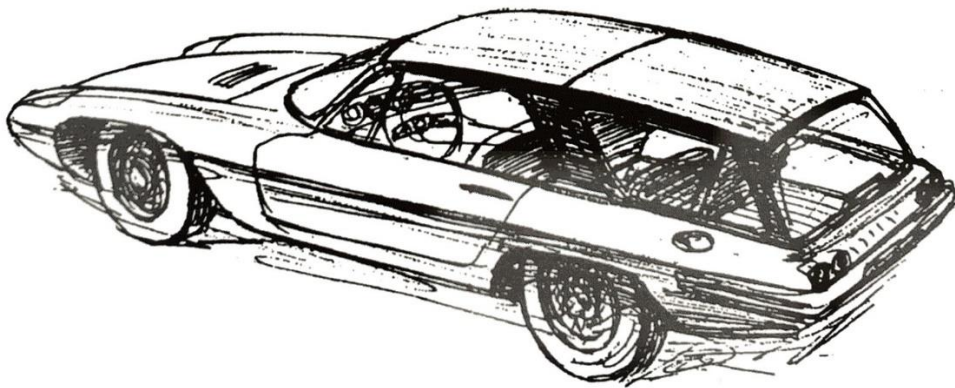




CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION



The Elan Plus 2 Estate Conversions

In the 2017 spring edition of Club Lotus News we looked at the well-known and much admired Shapecraft fastback Elans. We also looked at the estate conversion of the Elan by Hexagon in the spring 2015 edition and the Elan Fastbacks in the spring of 2018. Although Lotus never built a production estate version of the Plus 2, a number of cars were converted by various individuals or firms. We thought we should now take a look at those we know of.

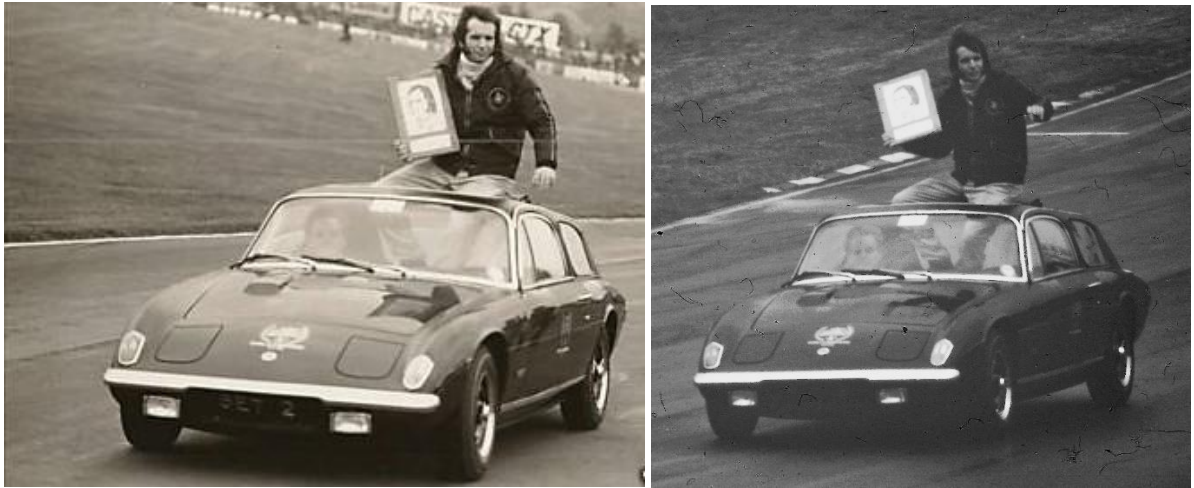
The Hickman Estate



This is thought to be the closest rendering of the Hickman estate, a 3/8ths scale model

Having written that Lotus never built a production estate, we do know that Ron Hickman, the genius behind both the Elan and +2, turned his attention to the possibility of an estate version. He even went as far as drawing some sketches and making a model of the styling he had in mind at the time. In fact, his ideas took the utility of the +2 further. He envisaged a fixed roof and C pillars allied to a removable boot lid, rear scuttle and rear screen. This allowed for both an estate and a sports pick-up version, as well as the coupe. Although Hickman first penned his ideas in 1961, it was not until late 1965 that he persuaded Colin Chapman that project M28 should be seriously considered. However, the idea was killed off by the Lotus board in January 1966, due to problems with achieving a decent front and rear weight distribution under all loads and the late running development of the 907 engine, which was envisaged as a suitable power plant for the concept.

The Fittipaldi Estate



The Fittipaldi Estate with Emerson, taken at the John Player Victory race meeting at Brands Hatch on 22nd October 1972. The right hand photo, courtesy of John Elwin, appears to have been taken a few seconds after the well-known photo on the left. Elwin was at that meeting spectating

The earliest estate Plus 2 we are aware of was photographed on 22nd October 1972 with Emmerson Fittipaldi sitting on the roof, holding a portrait plaque, which he had just been presented with. He is doing a parade of honour around Brands at the John Player Victory meeting. The photo is often incorrectly stated to have been taken at the Rothmans 50,000 meeting earlier that year. In the programme for the meeting it is stated that Emerson was to 'mount a float bearing the car (Formula 1 Type 72) and members of the team' to demonstrate thanks to the fans. No mention of a special Plus2!

Very little more is known about this estate conversion. It carries the registration mark SET 2, which bears no relation to anything to be found in the race programme mentioned above. The Stromberg bonnet would point to it being an early Plus 2S 130, assuming that such a car used for this role would be a reasonably recent model. Unsurprisingly, the car is wearing what appear to be JPS decals on the bonnet and doors, from which we might assume that it was coloured gloss black. However, the date is seven months before the announcement of the JPS Plus 2S 130/5 specials, so the car is not one of them. The conversion has something of the Hickman design about it, since the straighter roof line of the rear joins the standard rounded roof of the cabin. The rear windows lack any chrome surrounds, so were probably bonded in with rubber edges. Due to its lack of a Norfolk registration similar to those used on press and road test Elans of the same era, it is not thought to be a Lotus built estate. Perhaps it was a one-off special commissioned by a Lotus dealer. If anyone knows anything more about this car, please do get in touch.

The Ritchie Estate



Peter Ritchie built this estate by himself between 1979 and 1983

Peter Ritchie had a dream. And a growing family. Having owned two Elans and a +2 previously, he was already an Elan enthusiast. As an RAF officer flying fast jets he also had limited time. So the fact that he made his +2 estate at all is remarkable and testament to his creativity and hard work. Mind you, it took him four years before he was able to enjoy the fruits of his labour. In many ways the Ritchie estate is an aesthetically pleasing interpretation of a Plus 2 estate version.



The rear side window area was formed using ply and dowels, the roof line being built up with wood framing and chicken wire, in preparation for mould forming, as below



Peter has kindly provided photographs and information about the work he carried out on the donor car, a 1969 +2 registered 396 JKA, which had failed its MoT. Peter made up the wooden framework in the shape that he had already envisaged, utilising the rear frame and window from a Reliant Scimitar GTE SE5, hard wood formers and longitudinal dowels, not dissimilar to a balsa wood model aeroplane. Once he was content with the shape he covered the wooden frame with wire mesh and then used plaster of Paris to fill and smooth to shape. This allowed Peter to make up a three piece fibreglass female mould and thence the finished male GRP article. This he bonded on to the body, so well that no sign of the join was visible, once the car had been resprayed in white. Rigidity of the large flat roof area was achieved by laying up a thicker glass bed and incorporating bracing tubes. The tailgate area is the moulding Peter took from the Scimitar item, only the glass of the opening rear window being retained. Details also included recesses built in for the rear lights, number plate and fuel filler cap. The rear bumper was moulded from a VW Golf and the boot floor was remodelled to take an Elan fuel tank.



The finished car shows what a very professional job Ritchie carried out, entirely on his own

Having completed the body Peter had to restore the suspension, running gear and engine. A new Spyder chassis was also bought. He built up, to his own design, a new wiring loom, incorporating the heated rear window and rear window wash/wipe from a BL Maxi. The radio slot was used for matching switches for the additional electrical items and a radio-cassette player fitted into a bespoke housing mounted in the centre of the roof. The interior was re-carpeted, including the rear load area and much sound deadening material installed. Glass for the side and door windows was made to order and fitted by Peter. He had to use the frames from a Jaguar Mk IX on the doors and, in an effort to aid ventilation further, he installed a Britax sunroof. Peter re-trimmed the front seats, took the dash back to wood and re-varnished it, then prepared the car for its final layers of paint, which included running it for a year in primer to eradicate any potential cracks. There is no doubt that Peter Ritchie, on his own, produced a very fine finished Elan estate.

The car was run for some 12,000 miles, during which time Peter was stopped twice by curious police, asked to replicate it and offered a job by a kit car company. Peter sold it in 1985, as his children had outgrown the rear seats. He remains a Lotus enthusiast, currently running an Excel, which replaced an S1 Elise 111S. His estate is, sadly, no more. It was written off after being reversed into a tree at some speed, then rebuilt but back to standard +2 shape.

The Chrysalis Estate



Not strictly speaking an estate, the Chrysalis was more of an airy hatchback version. This is the only known photo of it

The so called Chrysalis estate was built by an unknown member of Club Lotus in the 1980s and reported upon in a previous edition of this magazine. Since that report was the only known evidence of the car's existence, we feel it best to quote from what was written then about it.

Apparently the donor car body had been comprehensively burnt, so the re-body was by way of using the chassis, driveline and engine parts that remained. It had originally been planned to make up a new convertible body. However, what developed was something of a unique body type! The owner takes up the story: "So it did take a long time to do the body. Really, it is a new twentieth century art form – fibreglass sculpture. In laying out the actual body shape I played safe by making it to the same overall dimensions as the original Plus 2.

As to aerodynamic characteristics, the sum of my knowledge was that the centre of pressure of the profile should be behind the centre of gravity to give stability in a side wind, and since I was building a fastback, that was certain enough. Really, I wanted a convertible, but the bother raising and lowering the hood in the variable English weather is a nuisance, and a closed car is easier to make look pretty. Therefore I decided to have the roofline follow a symmetrical curve from the windscreen to the rear, and make it completely out of two Perspex panels. The front panel would be able to slide right back over the rear in a pair of double channel aluminium sliders, which would give the open air impression of a convertible, while the rear panel would slide forward to give access for luggage. There would be a few inches overlap in the middle. I was a little dubious about this scheme, since I had never seen it on a car roof anywhere else, but in practise it has worked well. One critic did describe it as a "mobile greenhouse", and indeed parked in the sun it does get hot enough inside to ripen tomatoes, but by releasing a single catch and sliding the front panel right back, up goes all the hot air in a miniature thermal.

The one shape feature I could not do for myself was the windscreen. Obviously it would be far too expensive to have one specially moulded, so I looked around the scrapyards and bought for £5 a nicely curved one from a 1961 Capri. With the chassis blocked up straight and level, and the suspension

springs removed so that the wheels could be fixed in the normal ride position, the windscreen, seat, and steering wheel were clamped in what seemed to be a comfortable relationship. I then bent long thin strips of wood to form what looked like an appealing shape, covered them with chicken wire, then hessian soaked in plaster, followed by more plaster, then smoothed to give a final shape to the mould. After painting and waxing, two layers of matt and resin were applied. With the mould smashed up from the inside, the wobbly fibreglass shell was bolted onto the chassis, sheet fibreglass bulkheads bonded on, the whole lot covered with fibreglass putty and smoothed down, doors and bonnet lid cut out and reinforced, then primed, painted and polished. About fifteen hundred hours' work altogether."

The distinctive body work is perhaps not to everyone's taste, but it reflects the owners wish to have a versatile sporting car and his interpretation of what the Elan could look like. Again, very little is known about the subsequent history of this car, so if you know, please do get in touch.

The Makhlouf Shooting Brake



The Estralle Shooting Brake, which Roger Makhlouf had Paul Matty build to his design

Roger Makhlouf's Lotus Estralle Shooting Brake was built by Paul Matty Sports Cars in 2007. Roger's inspiration for this project came after he had seen the Richie estate at a Club Lotus Castle Combe meeting in the 1980s. Roger's is perhaps the most accomplished estate conversion and is still in regular use, testament to its purpose, usefulness and practicality.

The building and design of the car was a joint project between Roger and Paul. Importantly for Roger, they were able to retain the rear lights and boot lip, such that the rear view of the car is still recognisably Plus 2. The rear door opens to bumper level, whilst the rear window is cleverly integrated into the door to give both wide access as well as good visibility. However, Roger was not able to retain the rear three-quarter vents, the rear side windows proving something of a challenge to the project. To make the aluminium roof structure Roger and Paul called on the modern Shapcraft Company, based in Northamptonshire. In the end it was their interpretation of Roger and Paul's design that lead to the form of those rear side windows. They follow the already elegant waist line of the Plus 2, the roof being a uniform line that aids rear headroom and maximises rear load space, whilst the lower part of each window dips to the rear in a distinctive way. The glass for the rear windows and hatch was made expressly for this car and thus somewhat expensive! A bespoke stainless fuel tank was fitted into the space below the rear load area cover. We know that rigidity of the estate body is always critical to the driving integrity. To achieve this Paul made up a tubular structure, part of which links the rear suspension turrets, to beef up the replacement chassis used.

To further enhance the design, the interior was reworked to a high and more modern standard. Electric headlight activation and central locking were fitted, as well as two 12 volt power sockets in the rear. Burr walnut panelling for cubby holes in the rear three quarter area matches the burr walnut standard dash. High quality magnolia coloured leather ensconced the 1974 Lotus Elite front seats, folding rear

seats, turret covers, doors and other touch points. The seat belts were blue, matching the Lotus Mediterranean Blue, Code A32, body colour. The rear load area was also covered in matching leather with stainless runners. The roof lining used was union cloth, the same as that used by Bentley Motors. Much additional sound deadening material helped eliminate any drumming effect from the larger roof and add to the luxuriousness of the cabin. The tailgate had retainers for a bespoke gentleman's umbrella with the registration embossed on the ring. The rear screen was heated and had a working rear wash/wiper.



The rear load area, showing the burr walnut cubby holes, leather floor and red door open warning lights, as well as the special bespoke twin pipe silencer

Roger retained the mechanical, driveline and powertrain of the donor Plus 2S 130/5 Elan. However, the Big Valve twin cam was rebuilt, blueprinted and tuned to produce 140bhp. A larger, specially fabricated silencer with twin pipes was also fitted. Roger still owns the car and uses it during the summer months, where it continues to turn heads and provoke comment. He says that it drives very well, better than the Plus 2 Cabriolet that he also owns. The high standard achieved in the building of this estate is testament to the skill of Paul Matty and his team, as well as the vision that Roger brought to the realisation of his dream.

Roger has ended up with the closest version of a bespoke carrozzeria shooting brake Elan Plus 2 that anyone has so far built. Perhaps in years to come it will be recognized as such and win plaudits at events like Pebble Beach. Meanwhile, he is able to enjoy the practicalities and excitement of a wonderful Elan estate.

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