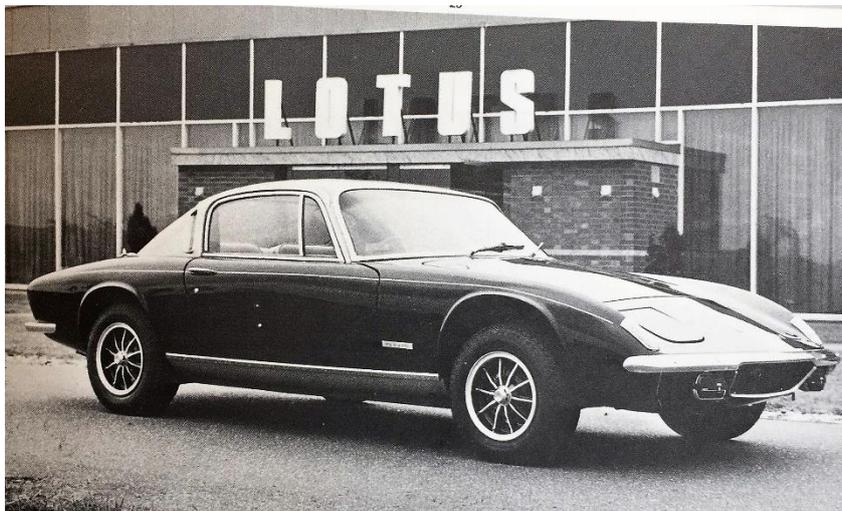




CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION



The Elan Plus 2S 130/5 John Player Special

Having reviewed some of the variants produced for the Elan and Plus 2 in previous magazine articles, we thought it right to have a look at the only true special edition Lotus produced for the Elan, with what has become known as the John Player Special (JPS) Plus 2. In fact, Lotus never called this a JPS. However, for the sake of brevity and because it has become an accepted way of defining them, we shall continue to use JPS in this article to describe this variant.

The press announcement made in 1973, shortly after Lotus had won the Spanish Grand Prix held that year at Montjuïc on 29th April, states that the car is “a special edition to celebrate the 50th Grand Prix victory”, the first racing team to have achieved that figure. So let’s look a bit further into what Lotus said back then, before we turn our attention to the car.

The press release, signed by Martin Walter of Lotus Cars Ltd, states: “To commemorate this notable achievement, Lotus Cars today announced the introduction of a special liveried S130 – the current prestige vehicle in the line up”. Clearly then, the public were about to learn that Lotus were going to paint some of their top of the range cars in a special palate.

The statement goes on to detail just what this would entail: “Finished with a black body, gold roof, gold door sills and gold coachmakers’ stripe, this vehicle makes a striking addition to the colour range. It also

features cloth finished upholstery.” So no mention at all of the racing team’s sponsor, nor the fact that the colour scheme reflected that used by the Formula 1 team cars. It’s also of passing interest to note that the colour of the upholstery is not specified, though Lotus were by then supplying the Plus 2 with either black or oatmeal versions.

The final paragraph of the press release is also revealing on another matter that we shall broach in a moment. It says: “Initially, Lotus will only produce fifty of these vehicles for sale in the UK and Europe. The car itself remains unchanged in specification, being fitted with electric windows, reclining seats, spot/fog lights, etc etc, and listing amongst its many options the highly successful Lotus five speed gearbox.” The mention of fifty being produced, obviously to mirror the number of grand prix victories, we now know to have been exceeded in actual production.



A resplendent JPS Plus 2S 130/5 gleams in the sun

It’s a question that often gets asked, how many JPS Plus 2s Elans were made? The Lotus records never recorded the so-called JPS versions as such, neither were they recorded as 50 grand prix victory commemorative models. Rather they are identifiable by their paint code of LO 15 Black Gloss and the extent of each cars options list. That is because we know these cars had oatmeal interiors, tinted Sundym glass and the Phillips Turnolock radio. The majority of JPS’ were fitted with the five speed gearbox, though we know a handful were ordered with the four speed. It is this that was reflected in the press release, with mention of the optioned five speed unit.

Given these facts we now know that 115 JPS versions of the Plus 2S 130 rolled off the production line at Hethel. Unit 1398L was a Lotus 'company car' delivered to Lotus Engineering and first registered on 1st June 1973. This JPS development car was used by Lotus during the 1973 British Grand Prix at Silverstone on 14 July to give press rides in, with Ronnie and Emerson driving. The first production car was Unit Number 1476L, which was invoiced in June 1973 and sold via the Ken Myers dealership in Northamptonshire. This car still exists and is a fine example of the Plus 2S 130/5. The final Unit Number for the JPS cars was 1832L, which was invoiced in December 1973 as a Plus 2S 130 with a four speed gearbox; it too still exists. As a side note, we have no records of a JPS M type for European export. If any members have such a car, we would be delighted to hear from them.



*Mark Kempson had a very original early JPS Plus 2, seen here patiently awaiting some restorative work
(It is the car on the right!)*

The last few JPS Plus 2s had black roofs. The gold roofs had started by having the minute gold metal flakes infused inside the gel, later being incorporated into the paint. Neither method had proved to last very long, a dull sheen tending to appear after a while, particular to the gold roof. By quarter four of 1973 the popularity of the gold and silver metal flake roofs had anyway waned to the extent that it became economically feasible for Lotus not to offer them anymore.

We have noticed that, like many of the later Plus 2S 130s, JPS Elans tended to be fitted with the Federal knock-on wheel nuts, as opposed to the three eared version. However, this is not a defining feature. What the JPS did have was a small plaque, mounted low on the off-side front wing, which stated "Limited Edition to commemorate first 50 Lotus grand prix wins". The words were black, the background gold, appropriately. It is also interesting to note that at the October 1973 London Motor Show, Lotus revealed the several improvements to all Plus 2 Elans. These included a revised centre console with recessed seat belt fittings, nylon seat panels (note that 'cloth' had been dropped) on oatmeal trimmed cars only, a new stitched facia crashpad and a gold line detail (note that 'coachmaker' had also been dropped) on the paint finish. The show cars were all painted Roman Purple that year.



A JPS next to a JPS, in period

Whilst the only special edition Elan is of historical interest, it is not necessarily of especially collectable or valuable significance. Underneath the black and gold paintwork the JPS remained very much a standard Plus 2S 130. Indeed, it cost no more to order one of these than a 'standard' car. We therefore feel that, as the market currently stands, there is no particular reason that JPS Plus 2s should attract any kind of a premium over others. This may change in years to come, or it may not.

Finally, it should be recorded that Graham Arnold was against the creation of special editions, but that Colin Chapman was very much for them. Graham was not at Lotus when the 50th commemorative special edition was produced!

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