



CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION



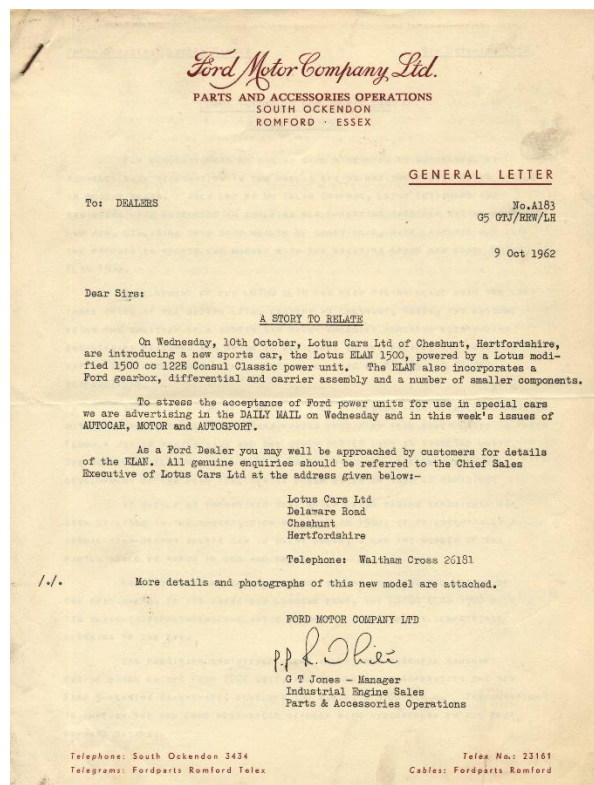
A press photograph of the Elan from October 1962

The Lotus Elan Is Launched

The London Motor Show of October 1962 showcased several new car models. For us the most significant of these was, of course, the Lotus Elan 1500. In researching this article it has been tricky pinning down much in the way of concrete evidence, ephemera or other useful information. We would therefore be happy to hear from anyone involved with the launch or who has any interesting additional information. What we can say with a high degree of certainty, is that the Elan was to prove of great significance, not only to motoring enthusiasts, but also to Lotus as a commercial entity.

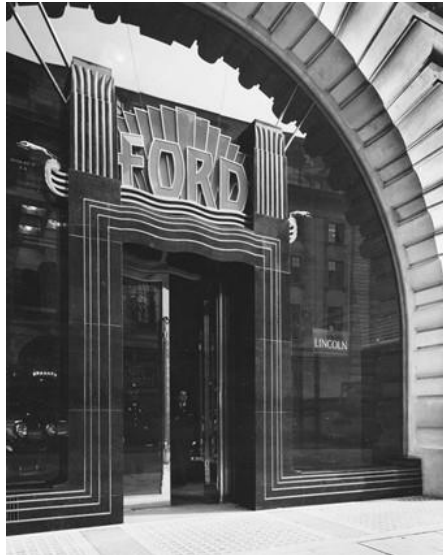
The birth pangs of the Elan were hard and long. Given the size of Lotus at the time, this was not surprising. Equally, the fact that the company was concurrently introducing a new sports saloon in the form of the Lotus Cortina as well as a new twin cam engine of their own design, it is remarkable that these significant achievements were made by the small but dedicated team at Cheshunt at all. Added to this was that Lotus were emerging as a force to be reckoned with on the race circuits of the world in several formulae. Colin Chapman and his team of brilliant young designers, including Ron Hickman and eager workforce must have been working very hard!

The London Motor Show in 1962 was held at the traditional Earls Court venue in central London, starting on Wednesday 17th October, closing ten days later on Saturday 27th. However, a small but distinguished list of selected guests and motoring correspondents had been introduced to the new Elan a week before, on Wednesday 10th October. This gathering was held at the Ford Motor Company's main London show room and head office at 88 Regent Street. Not only did this provide an excellent location for a press reveal, but it also demonstrated the close relationship the tiny Lotus firm enjoyed with the giant Ford concern at the time.



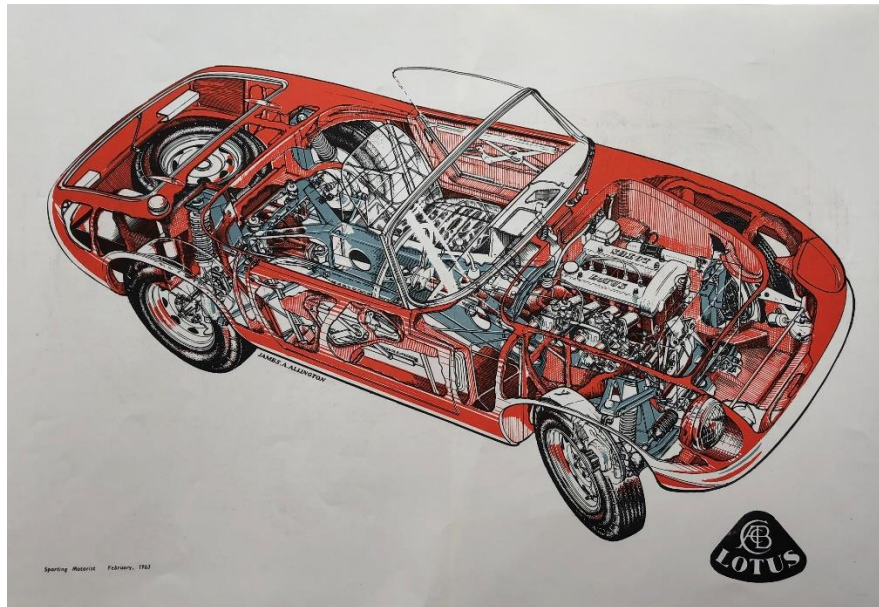
Ford Motor Company reveal the Elan to their dealers

As the image attests, Ford told their UK dealership about the Elan in a letter dated Tuesday 9th October, in which they not surprisingly emphasised the use of many Ford components in the makeup of the new car. Amongst the guests at the Regent Street showrooms that day was Bill Boddy, Editor of Motor Sport magazine. He wrote in their next edition to hit the stands “The Lotus was announced amid all the glamour of the Ford showrooms in Regent St W1, and is surely the fastest car ever to have been seen in these plush surroundings.”



The Ford showroom in Regent Street

Adverts for the Elan appeared in several daily newspapers as well as the motoring magazines. They coincided with the interest and delight with which potential buyers of the car greeted its motor show debut. The Lotus stand, unsophisticated by today's standards, showcased the simple yet ground-breaking chassis and engine configuration, raised on four wheel stands, with polished engine and suspension components and gloss dark red cam covers. On one flank was one of the M2 pre-production Elans in Cirrus white. On the other flank, on a raised turntable, sat another of the M2 pre-production cars, this one in Carmen red. It tended to be the centre of attention, for as it turned, the headlights were raised and lowered continually, flashing as they went. Bill Boddy remarked “Chapman ingenuity – the Elan rotated on a turntable, with its lamps section retracted and extended, flashing as it went round.”



The February 1963 edition of Sporting Motorist carried this colour rendition of the Allington drawn cutaway

To the rear of the cars at the back of the stand there was just room for a small table and four chairs, presumably where eager potential owners were signed up by Lotus, as well as a small storeroom for brochures, refreshments and coats. The brochures, all proclaiming the 1500cc engine, ran out pretty quickly and had to be supplemented with printed sheets of paper, until the following year when the budget allowed for a reprint with the later correct 1600cc engine details. We know the stand would have had several distinguished visitors during the show. There is a fine photograph in the Crompton book on Chapman, showing Colin, his father Stanley and grandfather Frank gathered around the white Elan. That must have been a proud moment for three generations of Chapman. Equally, no less a proud moment during the same year, when Colin's son Clive was born.

Motor magazine was quick off the mark, with a report in their edition which came out on 10th October. It must have been an almost verbatim copy of the Lotus press release, no doubt embargoed until that very day. Autocar and Autosport very rapidly followed suit with reports on the Elan 1500 in their editions of 12th October. Motor Sport and Small Car both carried reports in their November monthly editions. By December The Chequered Flag, long signed up as Lotus dealers, were advertising that they were taking orders for the new Elan 1500. It was not until January 1963 that the foreign press could get their reports out, with Road & Track, Sports Car Graphic and Sports Car World all reiterating what the domestic press were claiming was a revolutionary and dynamic new British sports car.



Autosport's John Bolster peers into the engine compartment of 766 BOO

No-one, though, outside of the factory, had yet had a chance to actually drive this fantastic new machine. The first road test was a brief one, secured by John Bolster of Autosport, not via the factory, with whom he had close relations, but via The London Sports Car Centre's managing director Alan Foster. It appeared in Autosport's 8th March 1963 edition, registered 766 BOO and with Unit Number 0003.

We now find ourselves in 2022, 60 years on from that launch. We should take the opportunity to celebrate the Elan and to mark its success as it enters its seventh decade. Elan owners and enthusiasts are invited to join Mark, myself and fellow followers of this remarkable sports car at the factory at Hethel, on Sunday ??th of ? 2022 to do so. And to wish Clive a happy 60th too!

Contact Us

Tim Wilkes and Mark Kempson can be contacted via email at elansection@clublotus.co.uk or via Club HQ by post or on 07720 288100