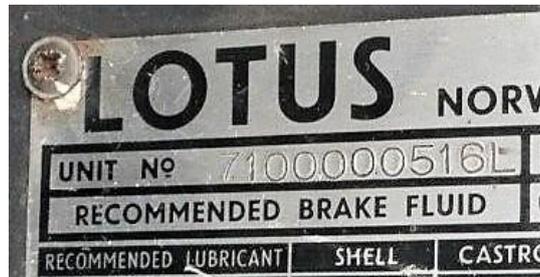




CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION

Refreshed or Retrofred!



An Elan +2S VIN showing the perplexing number of Os associated with Retro Fred cars

In 1971, especially in the earlier part of the year, life at the Lotus factory at Hethel became quite hectic. The Elan Sprint was being put into production alongside the Plus 2S 130. The new Lotus Big Valve twin cam was the reason and the engine had really got the market excited. It had been recognised for a while that the Elan could happily manage more power. The announcement of the engine and proposed model enhancements at the October Earls Court Motor Show the previous year had started to build demand from dealers and customers alike. When deliveries began in late February and the road test reports hit the motoring press, enthusiastic potential owners began to knock on their dealers doors, wanting to get their hands on the revitalised Elans. The factory had to gear up production even more.

At the time there were a number of unsold S4 Elans and +2S' parked up in the new car hangars and runway car park at Hethel. Graham Arnold, the Sales Director at that time has written of Lotus Group Accountant Fred Bushell coming up with the plan to refresh these cars and turn them into the latest model, by a wave of the retro fit magic wand. Arnold states that Bushell became known as 'Retrofred' by Colin Chapman as he was always retro fitting parts to cars or updating them to the later model. On the other hand, Tony Rudd, Group Engineering Director, has a different take. In his interesting autobiography 'It Was Fun', he wrote: "We worked out a scheme to combine converting engines with reworking the stock of unsaleable cars (the prime cause of which was body and paint defects). I suggested we give the Plus 2 a silver roof – to identify the increased performance – since most of its body problems were on the roof, and I proposed we paint the belly of the Elan white, as this was the area of most of their paint and bodywork defects. By this means we could rework the unsaleable cars,

freshen them up and fit them with more powerful engines, which would make them attractive enough to start selling them again." And "I nearly lost my newly-awarded medal when I referred to the rework area as the mushroom factory." Later he recalls that early 1971 period "... we were soon selling more than 70 cars a week (35 new Big Valves, 25 reworks and the rest Europas) instead of 35 at the depth of the 1970 crisis."



An Elan +2S on the production line at Hethel

As part of our investigations we would welcome hearing from factory workers at Hethel at the time who would remember refreshing some of these cars. We know Lotus had done something similar before, as Richard Parramint has written "I remember the winter of either 69 or 70 we were asked to work in the hanger to the left of the factory. Our job was to bring in +2 Federal cars that had stood on the test track unsold and convert them from left-hand to right-hand drive kit cars. Some of the cars had sat out there for six months, so you can imagine the state some of them were in."

So what do we now know about refreshed Elans? We have previously written about the S4/Sprint. 79 S4 Elans were converted to Sprint specification; they all retained their original Unit numbers. However, many more cars were reworked and then given a new Unit number. These cars are identifiable by their 710000 VINs, missing both the month and batch digits. Currently we have a confirmed list of 65 such cars, covering the C, E, G, J, K Elan types & L Plus 2 type. Unfortunately many of the Elans are in the batch of records that were destroyed during the flood in the old fire station hut at Hethel in the late 1970s.

DATE ISSUED	ORIGINATOR	CUSTOMER	ORDER No.	DESTINATION	DELIVERY
3-12-70	OFF. WORKS HOME JD/HS			U.K.	JAN. 71
SPECIFICATION					
DORSET COURSE					
VARIANT TYPE: STANDARD					
ASSEMBLY KIT		SPEEDO	MILES		R/O
DRIVE	RIGHT	ELECTRICS	U.K.		SEAT
GEARBOX	SEMI	BREATHER	U.K.		SEAT BELTS
DIFF.	5+7	ENGINE	STD		TUNING
WHEELS	R/A	BODY COLOUR	RED		
TYRES	SPORT	TRIM COLOUR	BLACK		
COST £		COST £		COST £	
TOTAL ADDITIONAL COST £					
SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS: CONVERTED TO SPRINT					
NEW NO. 0349G					
APPROVED:			PROD. CONTROLLER		

A Works Order sheet for a Series 4 Elan DHC with the 'Converted to Sprint' and new Unit number shown

The earlier original Unit number is often revealed during restoration, when the crayon marks usually found on the transmission tunnel reveal a different number to the known VIN Unit number. The C type Standard Domestic DHC Elans are unusual, in that we have a partial record of which S4 became which Sprint. Unit numbers cover a range of some 33 cars, 6 of which we are able to confirm. The A type cars had 1 confirmed conversion. The E type SE Domestic FHC Elan covers a range of 22 Unit numbers, 5 of which we can confirm. There is a range of 25 Unit numbers for the popular G type SE Domestic DHC, 12 of which are confirmed. We are aware of only 2 RoW cars, both F type Export FHC.

The J type SE Federal FHC Elan has a 16 car Unit number range and we can confirm 8 of those. The more popular K type SE Federal DHC Elan covers 26 Unit numbers and we can confirm 11 of those. Lastly we come to the more prolific L type Domestic Plus 2 Elan, which covers a Unit number range of 105 cars, of which we can confirm 23. If we add these 230 cars to the 79 S4/Sprints, we have a total of 309 cars that we believe to have been refreshed during 1971.



A Sprint DHC getting wired up on the Hethel line

As can be deduced from the above, we are nowhere near being able to confirm all of our current thoughts and deductions, which is often the way with Lotus records. However, we would like to appeal to any readers who have a VIN that begins with 710000 to contact us or the Lotus Archivist, Andy Graham at Hethel (agraham@lotuscars.com), if they have not already done so. Our wish is to rebuild the data that has gone missing over the intervening decades and your assistance is very much appreciated.

Contact Us

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