



CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION



The Elan Plus 2 – How Many?

The total number of Plus 2 Elans produced by the factory has always had journalists, historians and indeed the factory scratching their heads. At the time of manufacture any regard to historical information which may be required in years to come was just not considered. This makes our lives difficult now but it's certainly a subject that the Lotus community can discuss for a long time to come! In truth, we will never have a definitive figure but I decided I would have a stab at it!

As a starting point we need to look at the way in which Lotus allocated unit numbers. From the introduction of the +2 in September 1967 the Type 50 Lotus was allocated sequential numbers, starting as 50/0001. This system was used up until unit no 50/2536 at the end of December 1969.

From 1 January 1970 Lotus revised the way in which these unit numbers were allocated. The format became 7004070174L. This breaks down as 70 – Year of manufacture; 04 – Month of manufacture; 07 – Batch number; 0174 – Unit number; L – Letter to denote Elan type, L being the Plus 2 for the domestic UK market. From 1 January 1972 the batch number was dropped, so the format became, for example 72060287N

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 'gray' 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 a couple of points with regard to the Plus 2. It was only ever made at Hethel and it is my contention that by then Lotus was getting its act together in the run up to becoming a public company, so underhand goings on were less likely. Also +2 Elans were only ever available in component form in the eighteen months up until the introduction of the +2S in March 1969, thereafter only being delivered in a fully built state from the factory, as befitted the more exalted client base it was aimed at. [Afternote: However, see afternote below].

We now move on to the final unit numbers for each type of Plus 2. In chronological order the +2 numbers go from 50/0001 through to 50/1592, so 1,592 of that variety. Then the +2S went from 50/1593 through to 50/2536, a total of 943. Of these we do not know how many went for export or to the North American market, though we do know the first Federal +2 was 50/0857 in March 1968. When the new unit numbering system was introduced, things became a little clearer with regard to the breakdown of markets. We know that from January 1970 to February 1974, when Plus 2 production ceased (though the cars continued to be available at dealers until December 1974), a total of 1,909 L type cars were made for the domestic market and 380 M type cars were made for the export market. [Afternote: These L and M numbers have been revised downwards due to the Retrofred duplications. See Club Lotus News magazine October 2016.] 315 N type cars were made for the Federal marketplace from January 1970 to December 1972.

So we are now left with the following numbers:

PLUS 2 TYPE	TOTAL
+2	1592
+2S	943
L Domestic	1909
M Export	380
N Federal	315
TOTAL ALL TYPES	5139

What is very much harder to pin down is the number of S130 and S130/5 Plus 2s that were made. The S130 was introduced in February 1971, having been launched at the 1970 London Motor Show. For a short while the +2S was available alongside the S130. The S130/5 was introduced in October 1972 with the 5 speed gearbox being an option. Even Lotus never recorded which cars left the factory fitted with a 4 or 5 speed gearbox. I have not yet found any evidence that a single S130/5 was ever exported to North America from the factory.

In an interview with Colin Chapman in Car May 1972 it is said that the "overall breakdown of the Lotus Cars production (that is, excluding the Team Lotus 7 made by Team Lotus) is as follows: Europa 40%, Elan 35%, Plus Two S130 25%". However, in another interview in Autocar October 1972, Chapman states that about half of production is accounted for by Europas. Barry Carter, the Lotus General Manager Marketing, in the same article, gives the breakdown of production as Plus Two S130 20-25%, Elan 20-25%, Europa 50%. In the Group Lotus 1972 published results it states: "*Group* production for 1972 amounted to 2996 cars compared with 2682 in the previous year". These numbers probably include racing cars and Team Lotus 7s, as well as excess stock, so some cars may have been counted twice, in both years. That would give a 1971 production of some 537 to 671 Plus 2s and a 1972 production of some 600 to 749. Again in the same article Chapman says "roughly half our production is for the home market, a quarter Europe and a quarter America." From my own records in 1971, for example, I compute a figure very close to the 537 or 20% of production for the Plus 2.

In their seminal work on the Elan and Plus 2, Robinshaw and Ross report on a variety of total production figures. They quote Lotus News of October 1986 giving 5,200 and Jabby Crombac quoting 5,228, the latter in fact from figures compiled by Andrew Ferguson. They also provide a table with a breakdown concluding 4,526 as the total, though it clearly leaves out the export and Federal numbers. That would also appear to be the case for John Bolster, Messrs Batchelor, Poole and Robson and the LDC, all of whom quote figures ranging from an obviously erroneous 3,300 up to 4,798. Clearly we shall probably never know the true figure, but I hope that I have come as close as possible to getting there.

Now let's muddy the water further and talk about the JPS Plus 2. This was the S130 painted in the black and gold of Team Lotus sponsor's John Player Special. This version of the bigger Elan was produced to commemorate the team's 50th Grand Prix victory, which occurred at Barcelona in April 1973, courtesy of Ronnie Peterson. Allegedly 85 such cars left the factory, all fitted with a wing badge, which stated "Limited edition to commemorate first 50 Lotus Grand Prix wins". The cars tended to be fitted with all the options, including the 5 speed gearbox, though I do know several had a 4 speed. They all had the oatmeal interior with Ambla cloth inserts, the Phillips Turnolock radio, green tinted glass all round and the roof and sill were painted gold metalflake. The first production one, 1476L, came off the line in June 1973. Subsequent cars were built over the next five months. They are recorded in the Lotus Sales Book as being just black, so it was impossible to be precise about just how many were finished in JPS colours and which ones comprised the 85 alleged specials, since there is a total of 109 listed in the book, though some people have counted 115 and Graham Arnold once wrote of 118. Certainly it

appears the final 20 or so listed black cars ended up as black all over and again it was Graham Arnold who indicated that the metalflake process was causing too many problems at this time. [Afternote: The Lotus Archivist Andy Graham has made a study of the listing of these black cars from the records held at the factory and has concluded that the 115 number is the closest we shall get to being reasonably certain that is the actual number made].

Finally, another Lotus conundrum connected to the Plus 2. There are a few of the final cars with 7401 and 7402 unit numbers. Our old friend Graham Arnold claimed the final Plus 2 came off the production line in February 1974. However, my records show over 205 Plus 2s having 7312 unit numbers, with only a couple of cars having the 74 year in their VIN. Consider that some 1,029 Plus 2s were built in 1973, which is an average of 85 cars a month. To build over double the average in one shortened working (Christmas) month strikes me as being unlikely. So my supposition is that the majority of cars built in that December, January and February three months had their VIN plates stamped with 7312. Why? At this stage of my investigation I would assume that it had something to do with impending European Union safety or emission rules coming in to force, though I am happy to be corrected if anyone knows the true reason. I have found that manufacturers had to provide an attestation of conformity concerning gas emissions, ECE 15, which was mandatory for passenger cars registered from 1 January 1974. The word 'registered' probably provides the clue that Lotus, which had already decided earlier in 1973 to cease Plus 2 production, did not wish to have any additional expense involved in the 'legality' of the car and therefore decided to allocate Dec 73 VINs to the approximately 100 cars made in early 1974.

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