



CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION

Shapecraft Fastback Elan by Surbiton Motors

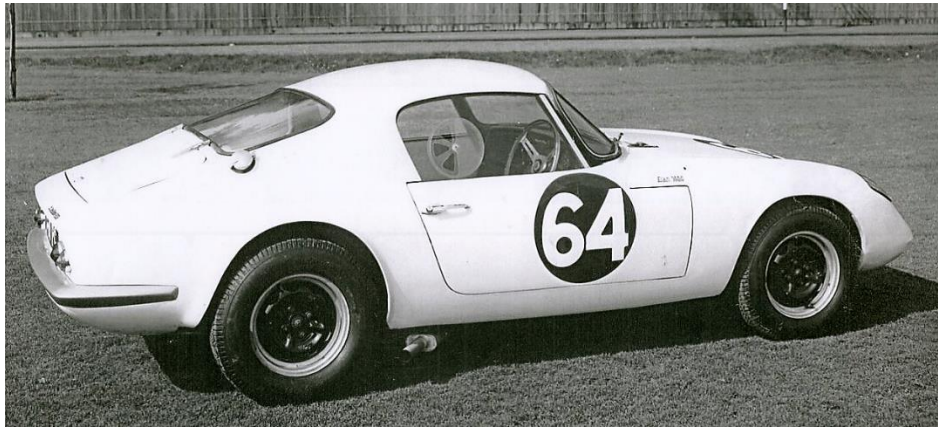


The Shapecraft Elans have over the last 50 odd years built up a certain mystique as well as consideration that they were a most attractive modification to the standard Elan. Not many were built, perhaps ten and no records exist from the time. However, Barry Woods is reported to have indicated that between 16 to 20 Shapecraft made, some sold new, a few converted from existing cars. So we thought it would be interesting to attempt to define the Shapecraft Elans as much as we might be able to, recognising that the passage of time and fading memories may mean we don't quite get it totally correct. Therefore if any members are able to add to or edit any of this story, we would be delighted to hear from them.

Shapecraft was a relatively small company based in Ewell Road, Surbiton, Surrey that worked in alloy and stainless steel, mainly for the aerospace industry. Barry Wood ran his Surbiton Motors Ltd garage nearby in Central Parade, St Mark's Hill, Surbiton. He was a keen club racer and had secured a Lotus

franchise, to run alongside his MG franchise. Surbiton Motors itself was a small operation, composing of Barry, his mechanic Chris and one salesman.

In March 1963 Barry Wood bought a white Elan, unit 26/0023. It was registered in Surrey as 39 PG. It was Barry who developed the idea to have a fastback added to his Elan, so at some time during the spring he asked Shapecraft if they could use their aluminium forming skills to fabricate such a roof for the Elan.



The first Shapecraft Elan, as conceived by Barry Wood

Shapecraft happened to have carried out some bodywork on another Elan for the design firm Ogle, including the fabrication of a smoother front section. We believe that this may have been for Stirling Moss, since his SMART Elan was listed in its second race as a 'Lotus Ogle Elan'. Its modified body comprised of a Frank Costin designed, Williams & Pritchard extended hardtop and an Ogle designed, Shapecraft fabricated smoothed front section, though we are still seeking confirmation that this is correct. The SMART Elan front section looks remarkably similar to that fitted to Barry's Elan. This aluminium front was never replicated on any other Shapecraft Elan. Shapecraft hand built the fastback roof out of aluminium and bonded it to the bodywork. All the trimming, glazing and painting was carried out back at the Surbiton Motors garage.

Barry then went racing in his Shapecraft Elan during the remainder of the 1963 season. In fact he first entered the scheduled GT race at Brands Hatch on 6 August 1963, with a 'Shapecraft' Lotus Elan, however, he was reported as Did Not Arrive. The first race he participated in appears to have been at a wet Snetterton on 23 August 1963. It was during this period that Barry had a local photographic studio, Lilley's of Surbiton, take some professional photographs of his Shapecraft Elan.

<p>LOTUS ELAN GT CONVERSION by "Shapecraft"</p>  <p>We are able to take orders for this and other conversions to individual requirements. Details on application.</p> <p>SHAPECRAFT 326 Ewell Road • Surbiton • Surrey • Elmbridge 0766</p>	<p>SURBITON MOTORS LIMITED as agents for SHAPECRAFT body conversions and owners of the car pictured, we invite customers to visit our showrooms to inspect this car.</p> <p>Offers are invited for the purchase of our Elan to complete racing specification. Strengthened chassis, modified suspension, competition shockers, special hubs, rear anti-roll bar, interior roll bar, lightweight racing seats, bell housing and differential carrier, close-ratio gearbox, several axle ratios, spare gearbox. Genuine 145 BHP Cosworth twin-cam engine and GT bodywork. 2 sets of wheels fitted with R.6 Dunlops.</p> <p>(CAN BE SEEN AT BRANDS HATCH ON SUNDAY) Also a varied selection of good used cars available for inspection. 1 Central Parade • St. Marks Hill • Surbiton • Surrey Elmbridge 8356</p>
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Surbiton Motors collaborated jointly with Shapecraft to market their conversion

At this stage the Shapecraft Elan was a one-off special with the bodywork fabricated straight onto the car. However Barry was so taken with the improvement to the roof-line that he decided to market it and persuaded Shapecraft to fund the making of a buck on which the tops could be more easily produced. By early October adverts appeared in the motoring press, combining the Shapecraft ability to 'take orders for the Elan GT version by Shapecraft, as well as other conversions to individual requirements.' Alongside this Surbiton Motors declared themselves 'as agents for Shapecraft body conversions and owners of the car pictured.' They also detailed some of the racing oriented improvements they were able to provide to an Elan.


A fuller advert by Surbiton was for the 'Lotus Elan GT Conversion, designed by Barry Wood and built by Shapecraft'. It went on to announce 'An attractive coupe conversion of the Lotus Elan 1600 sports car. Available for both racing and touring, this conversion increases the speed of the 105 bhp Elan to over 120 mph without impairing the acceleration times. A lightweight aluminium top section, resin bonded to the fibreglass body, shaped to give the best possible streamlining. The interior roof is finished and lined in rexine and the exterior is sprayed to match. Optional extras include pile carpets and knock-on wire wheels.' Another advert claims this as 'obviously the prettiest GT car on the market for years.' It states 'the price of the Elan in kit form with GT conversion £1,250'. Interestingly it also says that the 'extended nosepiece, £45 extra', though we know of no cars to which this was fitted.



26/0016 at home in Japan. Photo courtesy of thegaragista.com

We are aware of only two other Elans fitted with the Shapecraft conversion from this time. Unit 26/3141 was bought in August 1963, apparently by a milkman based in Brecon, Wales. It was registered as 55 GUL in London, presumably by the supplying dealership. A very early Elan, unit 26/0016, had been delivered to its new owner with a Lancashire registration, 7360 TJ in March 1963, well before the Shapecraft concept had been thought of. It is presumed that the Elan was subsequently delivered at some stage during the autumn to Surbiton to have its touring Shapecraft roof fitted.

By mid-November Barry Wood's own Shapecraft Elan was being advertised for sale by Lotus Retail Sales Department. Perhaps Barry had part exchanged it for new Elan stock with Lotus. It was advertised again by Lotus in mid-January 1964.



The LOTUS ELAN GT tried, proved and tested on the British circuits in 1963 GT racing

Combining the fantastic performance and handling capabilities, which only LOTUS can achieve with the luxurious comfort of a quality saloon car.

SPECIFICATION:	Extras include:-
Aluminium moulded top, complete with new boot lid and rear window, resin bonded to the Lotus fibreglass body, gives maximum rigidity, a further 5 mph on top speed with the additional streamlining gained. Interior, rexine lined, exterior, match sprayed.	Wire wheels £65
Price of conversion £170	Black Pile carpets £17
	Close ratio gears £35
	Radio £30
	Heater £21
	Standard Lotus colour range or B.R.G. Silver Grey or Blue
	Ferrari Red £30 extra

Inside the 1964 brochure

In November 1963 Barry Wood bought another Elan, unit 26/3152 this time in red. He had Shapecraft carry out the roofline conversion and had the car fitted out for touring. He then booked some space at the forthcoming Racing Car Show in London, which ran from 22 January to 1 February 1964. At the same time he had some blue and white brochures made up, perhaps to hand out at the show. These show a Shapecraft Elan, registered 863 EJU and fitted with knock-on wire wheels. The price of conversion was listed as £170 and close ratio gears, heater and radio were added to the options list. In addition to the standard Lotus colours, Ferrari red was offered for an additional £30. We have seen one photo of the car claimed to be on its stand at the show, though it has a Surrey registration of 6019 PL and standard Elan wheels.

To further complicate matters for us, the car exhibited at the Racing Car Show was almost immediately sold to Peter Sellers, re-registered in Surrey APJ 2B and given by him to Britt Ekland to celebrate their engagement. In fact they had met in early February and were married by 19 February 1964. Quick work, Peter!



The red Shapecraft Elan that Peter Sellers had just given to Britt Ekland to celebrate their forthcoming wedding

Whilst attending the Racing Car Show, Barry discovered that Lotus were about to start producing the 26R for the 1964 racing season. He immediately placed an order for one (26-R-20, race registered SM 1, for Surbiton Motors, not Stirling Moss!), persuading a good friend of his, Les Arnold, to purchase another one (26-R-4, race registered SM 2) at the same time. After their eventual arrival in the spring at Surbiton Motors garage, Barry's Elan having had to be returned to Lotus due to sand in the head casting, both these cars were fitted with Shapecraft tops, with the intention that Barry and Les would

race them as Team Surbiton Motors. Whilst Shapecraft made up these two roofs on the new buck, they introduced Perspex side windows behind the B pillar and a ventilation slot in the rear of the roof, running almost the length of the rear Perspex window. These side windows and vent were only ever fitted to these two 26R Elans and never to any other Shapecraft Elan. Barry's car would become road registered in Leicestershire as RFP 696B, whilst Les' car received the Surrey number BPE 230B.



SM1 race no 114 and SM2 race no 113 making a sandwich of Elan race no 112

Only one other 26R Elan was converted to a Shapecraft roofline. Major Dick Crosfield was a well-known club racer, who ordered his car (26-R-7) from Lotus in April 1964 and immediately had Surbiton fit the standard Shapecraft roof. The blue car was registered in Leicestershire as AUT 173B and on 25 April 1964 Crosfield competed in his first race in the car at Silverstone.

We are aware of some other Elans converted to Shapecraft roofs. There was a touring version, in red and which was exported in late 1964 to Singapore, where it did some racing; the photos we have seen show what we believe to be a Singapore registration, SL 5150. Another car was converted late in 1964, since it is a Series 2 Elan, which had been introduced to the market in November 1964. The photos we have seen show the car with a registration of TDF 1 and with a set of unusual widened Lotus knock-on wheels, finished in what appears to be chrome. In the case of the touring Shapecraft versions the Elans were usually delivered new in component form to Surbiton, assembled then sent to Shapecraft for the roof to be bonded on.



TDF 1 showing the neat treatment where roofline meets rear valance. Photo courtesy of allcarindex.com

The table below is not intended to be definitive, merely an easy way to identify those Shapecraft Elans we have been able to write about or subsequently informed of. Some of the cars listed may in fact be one and the same.

Unit No Invoiced Month/Year	Registration No	First Owner	Notes
26/0023 8.63	39 PG Later 886 UUR	Barry Wood	First car built. Raced by Wood. Special nose treatment Is in long term ownership of an enthusiast
26/3141 8.63	55 GUL		First owner was a milkman from Brecon. Sold at auction 2013. Still racing
26/0016 3.63	7360 TJ		Road car. Featured in Robinshaw & Ross book, now in Japan. Red
NK	NK		Reportedly there was a second Shapecraft bought new at the same time as the above car, in Burnley. Bought as a standard kit, then went to Surbiton to have the roof fitted. Badly damaged in Italy, repaired in Yorks then written off by employee of the repair shop.
26/3107			Details of a RHD Elan Shapecraft raced in France received. Unit No not verified. Ownership from 1964 all recorded.
26/3252 11.63	863 EJU		Reported to be the same as APJ 2B. Photo with wire wheels on Surbiton brochure. Was at auction in UK 2014. Still racing
12.63	6019 PL APJ 2B	Peter Sellers/Britt Ekland	Shown at 1964 Racing Car Show by Surbiton Motors. Bought by Peter Sellers to celebrate his engagement to Ekland. Red. Reported to be 863 EJU
26-R-7	AUT 173B	Dick Crosfield	Raced by Crosfield. Blue. Still racing

4.64			
26-R-20 2.64	SM 1 Later RFP 696B	Barry Wood	Rear windows fitted. Roof vent. Raced by Wood. Red. Still racing
26-R-4 4.64	SM 2 Later BPE 230B	Les Arnold	Rear windows fitted. Roof vent. Raced by Arnold. Red. Badly damaged at Zandvoort 1964. Still racing
	SL 5150		Touring version, exported in late 1964 to Singapore and raced. Last reported in HK. Red
	TDF 1		Touring version, chrome wheels. Based on a S2 Elan, so one of the last conversions. Present whereabouts unknown
26/5808 6.66	JBW 86D		One of the final S2 Elans, in long term family ownership. Not known when Shapecraft conversion done. At auction 2024

As can be seen, most Shapecraft Elans have become pure racing machines, due to their slightly slippery shape and the fact that they are eligible for historic competition. Over the years they have all undergone changes, some having different noses grafted on or a Kamm tail, almost all undergoing colour changes and of course, due to the nature of the racing environment, many undergoing bodywork repair. Some individuals and firms have replicated the shape, which is flattering for Barry Wood. What we have tried to do here is record the original Shapecraft Elans built in 1963 and 1964 only, along with the first specifications, where known. If you know of any additional information, please do get in touch.

Contact Us

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