

## LOTUS SPORT ELISE

### The cream of custard

Lotus' gorgeous Elise has already been credited with more than a dozen prestigious awards, including our own Top Sports Car accolade and it thoroughly deserves them all. But how does a ripsnorting lightweight race-ready version grab you? Firmly, one hopes. This Lotus Sport Elise is powered by the same delicious 1.8-litre 16v Rover K-series plant as the original version, but with an extra 72bhp, to make 190bhp at 7,500rpm (previously 118bhp at 5,500rpm). Torque has also been given a boost, from 121lb ft at 3,000 rpm to 139lb ft at 5,600 rpm. This is accompanied by a decrease in weight. Twenty kilos have been sliced off thanks to new lighter clamshells' (front and rear body panels to you and me). Give me the keys, now. Please. The Sport drives like an original Elise, only better. Hit the gas in first and you can feel the back end moving around ever so slightly as it powers off the line.

It's nothing unmanageable, but must be enough to let you know that you're driving something with a lot more bite than the ordinary car. And it keeps getting better. Where the standard Elise runs out of puff, this one leaps into action with seemingly unstoppable energy. With 284bhp per ton, midrange-pulling power is fantastic. It's a mind-blower. The finishing touch is a competition silencer that's lighter and noisier than before. It spits and bangs on every downchange and gurgles to accompany hard acceleration. Simply fab! On a more analytical note, according to Lotus, the Elise Sport takes 4.4 secs to do 0-60 while 0-100mph is managed in 10.7 - that's quicker than most cars to 60mph. Comparison factory figures for the boggy Elise are 5.9 and 18secs respectively. Top speed also sees the needle reach virgin territory 145mph against 126mph, says Lotus. The new close-ratio five-speed gearbox is a delight and gears pop in with the lightest of touches. The Sport also has phenomenal brakes, thanks to race pads and track-specification discs. Coupled to all that is one of the most fantastic-handling chassis in the world, yet one so charming that even my mother would be tempted to break her self-imposed 40mph limit. However, blessed with more of my father's genes, I couldn't resist giving this Sport a damn good thrashing - on the Lotus test track, of course, Officer. Body roll is a feature unknown to this car. Point it at a bend and it goes round. It is one the most rewarding cars you can buy. In the World. The Galaxy. The Universe.

Surefooted as a sneaker, it's reluctant to break traction unless instructed, or piloted by a madman. But that's to say you can't have an awful lot of fun in it. There are plenty of other ways of achieving sideways travel; simply hammer fast into a corner, lift quickly off the throttle mid-end, wait a nanosecond, then re-apply power and just the right amount of opposite lock. Get it right and you'll have a lovely big sideways drift on your hands, fluff up your co-ordination you'll be sweating it out trying to correct a spin. But to be fair, the Elise is always on your side, so getting it right is not that difficult. It helps that the Sport's suspension has been altered for optimum circuit behaviour. Now stiffer, it's likely to make the ride a little more harsh on public roads. Unfortunately these were out of bounds for my drive in this car, but frankly I was too wrapped up in its unfaltering performance to notice, or even care about the ride. The day ended with all fillings in place, though. From the outside, the car looks identical to its more-subdued sibling, apart from sitting 20mm lower on a fetching set of magnesium alloys. It's inside where the main visible differences lie. For starters, there's a whacking great brace across the passenger seat, which forms part of the roll cage - a great thing because it gives an excuse not to carry an occupant, and thus you can indulge in the Fuse's pleasures without being nagged continually. The driver also sits in an exclusive racing seat with a six-point harness and faces a race-style removable wheel - I suppose it's one-up from binging your car keys on the pub bar... Carbon fibre adorns the petite instrument binnacle and there's more splashed along the doors to give an extra-spotty look. Not that the cabin needs enhancements. Lotus is keen to stress that the Sport was created for competition use rather than road abuse and its price is comparable to a season's racing. At £33,645, it's £11,800 more than the £21,845 original - or the price of a Seat Ibiza Cupra Sport 8v. But, and here comes the clever marketing bit, you can buy each modification separately, adding the bits you feel you need, or want, to your original Elise. For example, the more powerful engine will set you back £6,450, the close-ratio gearbox £1500, dampers are £110 each, springs £45 each, the driver's seat and harness cost £445, the competition exhaust is £360, the roll cage is £410, and so on.

Is it worth it? Yes, if you need a reliable and fun companion for hill-climbs, sprints or club races. Yes, if you're a cashed-up car-crazed enthusiast who enjoys a rewarding drive. No, if you're satisfied, as you might well be, with the standard Elise's fantastic, brilliant, superb, wonderful, dream-like package. Me, I'd borrow someone's credit card and have the full monty. As it is, though, I can't even afford the steering wheel. Removed or not.

**Story: Vicky Butler-Henderson**



More power  
means more  
sideways,  
but only if  
you choose



