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THE ORIGINAL CAR WEEKLY

TRIPLET TEST

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vs Z4 and 350Z p42



Every secret detail

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AUDI Q5 THE CAR TO KEEP SUVs COOL

PLUS Why Porsche is plotting an amazing coupé 4x4 >>>



FIRST DRIVE



Lotus 2-Eleven
An Elise plus insanity

ROAD TEST



Vauxhall VXR8
'The Aussie M5 is ace'

ALSO INSIDE

- >> Nissan's MX-5 is go
- >> The most fun 'mini
- >> Maxing a 24-litre (with no front brakes)

DRIVEN

- >> Chevy's budget 4x4
- >> New Jag XJ V8



QUICK FACTS

Price £39,995 (track spec)

On sale NOW

0-60mph 3.8sec

Top speed 150mph



Lotus 2-Eleven

30.5.07, Hethel, Norfolk No boot, no windscreen, but it takes Lotus back to basics in style

FIRST VERDICT

Brilliant performance meets zero practicality. Everything a great Lotus should be, really

★★★★★

I'LL SPARE you any suspense here: the Lotus 2-Eleven is brilliant. "It's an engineer's response to the 340R," admits Lotus's head of development, Nick Adams. "The 2-Eleven is a track day enthusiasts' idea of a track car."

Which first and foremost means it's light: the simple body panels are glassfibre and all are bolted, not bonded, to the chassis for easier repair. The chassis itself is a hybrid of a Mk1 Elise cabin section (with

higher and stiffer sills than the latest model), mated to the latest Toyota-engined rear subframe. And at 745kg, the 2-Eleven somehow carries 190kg less than even a non-optional Exige S.

So it's spartan inside, then? Just a bit. There are seats, harnesses and driving controls, and that's about it: no windscreen, hood or doors.

Power comes from the supercharged version of the Toyota 1.8-litre engine, but from the track-only Exige 225 Cup. Normally it's not road legal, but the 2-Eleven can be put through low-volume SVA testing. The wick's turned up to 252bhp at 8000rpm, and it's as hilarious as you'd imagine.

The 2-Eleven has an enormous powerband, huge performance and the rortiest exhaust I've heard in an Elise-based car. Which, on a track, makes the new car brilliant. The steering is exquisitely weighted (it's actually lighter at low speeds because of the reduced mass), and is as responsive, communicative and as linear as they come.

Drive up to its limits and the 2-Eleven nudges into gentle

understeer, but you can drive around it; trailing the brakes or lifting into a bend makes it neutral or induces mild, catchable oversteer.

I think the balance is about right, but if you'd prefer the back to always let go first, the Ohlins dampers are two-way adjustable and there's a tweakable front anti-roll bar. There's even 18-step adjustable traction control, and the electronic owner's manual includes tips on suspension settings.

Unlike some track specials, the 2-Eleven is really very usable on the road, too. Lotus's factory is surrounded by brilliant B-roads and the 2-Eleven is just as fabulous on these as it is on the circuit. Like



TESTER'S NOTE

'No doors means this car is strictly for the agile. The sill is very high to step over.'

MATT PRIOR



Gorgeous rims help reduce unsprung mass



2-Eleven is undoubtedly an Exige with the roof and glass chopped off, but it has a pretty simplicity

NEWTECH AIR TRICKS

There are four air scoops atop the body of a 2-Eleven. The front pair are ostensibly for engine bay cooling, but also serve to slice a slow-moving boundary layer of air just before those intercooler-feeding rear vents, so it only gets higher-speed air.

So although the Exige – whose air intake is in the roof – has what seems a superior scoop location, the 2-Eleven's are actually more efficient.



Tweaked Toyota motor has 252bhp



Ergonomics are great because, er, there's nothing to distract you from driving

most performance cars – especially those with 338bhp per tonne – you can't get close to its limits most of the time, but even stroking it along at 60 or 70 per cent is a joy. The steering is still wonderful and the engine is flexible. It even rides well.

Downsides? A few. Caterhams, which have both a hood and boot to the 2-Eleven's neither, are actually more practical. And the Lotus is not cheap. The track car is £39,995; the SVA-approved road car gets a comfier, non-FIA driver's seat, a four-point harness instead of six, all the compulsories (lights, horn and so on) and an £1100 premium. And it still has no roof.

So downsides, yes. But compelling

enough ones not to give it the full five stars? Not by a long chalk. This car is a serious piece of work.

MATT PRIOR

SO GOOD

- Performance truly is phenomenal
- Divine handling, which can be adjusted to suit you
- The view out is great
- Roomy, comfortable cockpit

NO GOOD

- Luggage space: there is none
- At £40k, Lotus is asking a lot of money



Seats look extreme but they're comfy

FACTFILE

VITALS		LOTUS 2-ELEVEN
Price	£39,995 (track spec)	
Top speed	150mph	
0-60mph	3.8sec	
Economy	28mpg (est)	
CO ₂ emissions	10	
Kerb weight	705kg	
Engine	4-cyl in line, 1716cc, supercharged petrol	
Installation	Mid, transverse, fwd	
Power	252bhp at 8000rpm	
Torque	179lb ft at 7000rpm	
Gearbox	6-spd manual	
Fuel tank	43.5 litres	
Boot	Nope	
Wheels (Lr)	71 x 16in, 81 x 17in, alloy	
Tyres (Lr)	195/50 R16, 225/45 R17	

Road test top fives

Sometimes only blind prejudice will do. Here are our choices...

'Lotus is right on track' What matters this week

Track stars

These cars don't have to be practical, value is not a necessity and equipment is better for its absence. So imagine it's a glorious spring day, and you'll be driving down some of your favourite roads to a track day. What do you go in?



NEW ENTRY

Lotus 2-Eleven **£39,995**

Straight in at the top. The 2-Eleven has an immense blend of track and road brilliance. On a race track it's ludicrously fast, yet approachable in a way Lotuses should be. The steering is the best in the business, and the 252bhp supercharged Toyota engine is the most engaging an Elise variant has yet had. On the drive to and from the circuit it's brilliant too: fast when you want, enjoyable when you don't. We want one.

Fast, exciting, approachable. The best track day car there is ★★★★★



Porsche 911 GT3 RS **£94,280**

No other car could be driven with such confidence down a decent road, lapped to within an inch of its life on a circuit, and then happily be driven hard home again. Yes, the GT3 RS costs £94,280, which is a lot for a vehicle with a plastic rear window, but you'll be amazed at what this car can do.



Caterham R400 **£29,495**

The R400 is back. And this time it doesn't have an engine that feels likely to implode the 10th time you rev it past 7000rpm. The new 2.0-litre, 210bhp Caterham-fettled Ford motor is peachy and lighter than the old K-series motor, while its instant torque lets you play more tunes with the chassis. In a word, wonderful.



Lotus Exige S **£34,945**

Happiness is a track-focused car by Lotus. Think of this as 911 GT3-lite: four cylinders instead of six, 218bhp instead of 415bhp and crucially, 935kg instead of 1375kg. So the Exige is delightfully agile and has gorgeous unassisted steering. Its brakes and mechanicals are easily up to a hard day's track pounding too.



Ariel Atom supercharged **£35,000**

No 460kg road car really needs 300bhp, but if the chassis can handle it, and the Atom's (just about) can, then why the hell not? The supercharged Atom operates in a world of acceleration usually reserved for superbike riders. It is breathtaking and delightful in equal measure. With a dose of 'a bit bonkers' thrown in, too.



Ultimate luxury

- 1 Rolls-Royce Phantom** BMW has reinvented a legend.
- 2 Bentley Flying Spur** Very comfortable and very fast.
- 3 Ferrari 612 Scaglietti** Not a limo, but still has room for four.
- 4 Aston Martin Rapide** Not here yet, but it's coming soon.
- 5 Maybach 62** Tasteless, expensive and bettered by an S-class.



Fast estates

- 1 Audi RS4 Avant** Not massive but there's quattro traction, great handling and a sweet V8.
- 2 BMW M5 Touring** As good as the saloon but with more space.
- 3 Mercedes E63** Stupid amount of power and a huge boot.
- 4 Audi S6 Avant** Has style and Lambo V10 but an uncomfortable ride.
- 5 Chrysler 300C SRT8** For the performance it's a bargain but it lacks finesse.



Compact exec

- 1 BMW 3-series** Excellent engineering, brilliant drive.
- 2 Mercedes C-class** Runs the Three close, stylish looks.
- 3 Audi A4** Feeling its age but the badge holds appeal.
- 4 Alfa 159** Credible effort from the Italians.
- 5 Lexus IS250** Makes 3-series look boring. Poor overall.

Bubbling under Off the lists, but we love them all the same



Toyota Land Cruiser **£35k**
A wee bit unrefined but as tough as old boots.



Maserati GranSport **£67k**
Sonorous V8 wrapped in a flawed but pretty package.



Suzuki Swift **£9000**
Pseudo-Mini chic with a genuinely mini price tag.