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to smash Audi TT**

LOTUS



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**0-60 4.7sec
0-100 12.3sec
On sale summer**



NEW TVR

**900BHP CERBERA
V12 HITS THE ROAD**

PLUS

THE VERDICT 20,000 MILES IN A MERC A-CLASS




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THIS WEEK
PATRICK FULLER
 EDITOR


The last time Vauxhall put us behind the wheel of a new Corsa, we were so disappointed that we wrote an open letter to the company's bosses. Why, we asked, hadn't they spent more time on the car's ride quality and steering? It wasn't long before the changes came, but no amount of fettling could fix the fundamental mediocrity of the chassis.

This week, we give you a first taste of the all-new Corsa. In an

PROTOTYPE OR NOT, THE NEW CORSA DISPLAYS THE HALLMARKS OF LOTUS TUNING

ed.autocar@haynet.com

epic thrash through the South African veldt, we find out what makes Vauxhall's new baby tick. Prototype or not, the Corsa displays the hallmarks of Lotus tuning, both in the chassis and under the bonnet. Which is rather good news for anyone who wants an agile, dynamic supermini. But better than that, Lotus has still found time to work on projects dearer to its own heart. And, as you'll find overleaf, that's rather good news for anyone who wants an agile, dynamic supercar.

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 Tel 0208 287 5630, fax 0208 287 5759, e-mail autocar@haynet.com
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Hottest Elise

Lotus Exige Sport Elise racing car spawns high-downforce £33k street version. Engine is tuned to

LOTUS HAS unveiled an exciting new 200bhp road car based on the Sport Elise one-make racer.

The new model is called the Exige and offers enthusiastic motorists the chance to experience all the raw thrills of the race car on the road at a relatively knock-down price. The aggressively

styled Exige costs £32,995, putting it in direct competition with tamer alternatives like the £34,232 Porsche Boxster and £33,640 Mercedes SLK320.

The Exige weighs in at a svelte 780kg, just 10kg more than the Elise 111S.

Its K-series Rover four-cylinder engine is expected to

have an output that at 177bhp is 40bhp more than the Elise 111S's, with an optional tuning kit taking it to 200bhp. Acceleration is significantly stronger than any other road-going Elise.

Lotus quotes a 0-60mph time of 4.7sec, and 12.3sec for 0-100mph. *Autocar* wrung a 5.3sec 0-60mph time

out of the 111S, but it took 14.8sec to reach 100mph.

Part of the Exige's advantage lies in the stronger aerodynamic performance of its glass fibre coupe body. It is no more slippery than the standard Elise roadster, but generates significantly more downforce.

The body sits on top of the

Sport Elise chassis, itself a variant of the Elise roadster's unit. It is made from epoxy-bonded and riveted aluminium extrusions, with steel roll-over protection.

Visually, the car differs only marginally from the racing version, although some subtle modifications had to be made to make



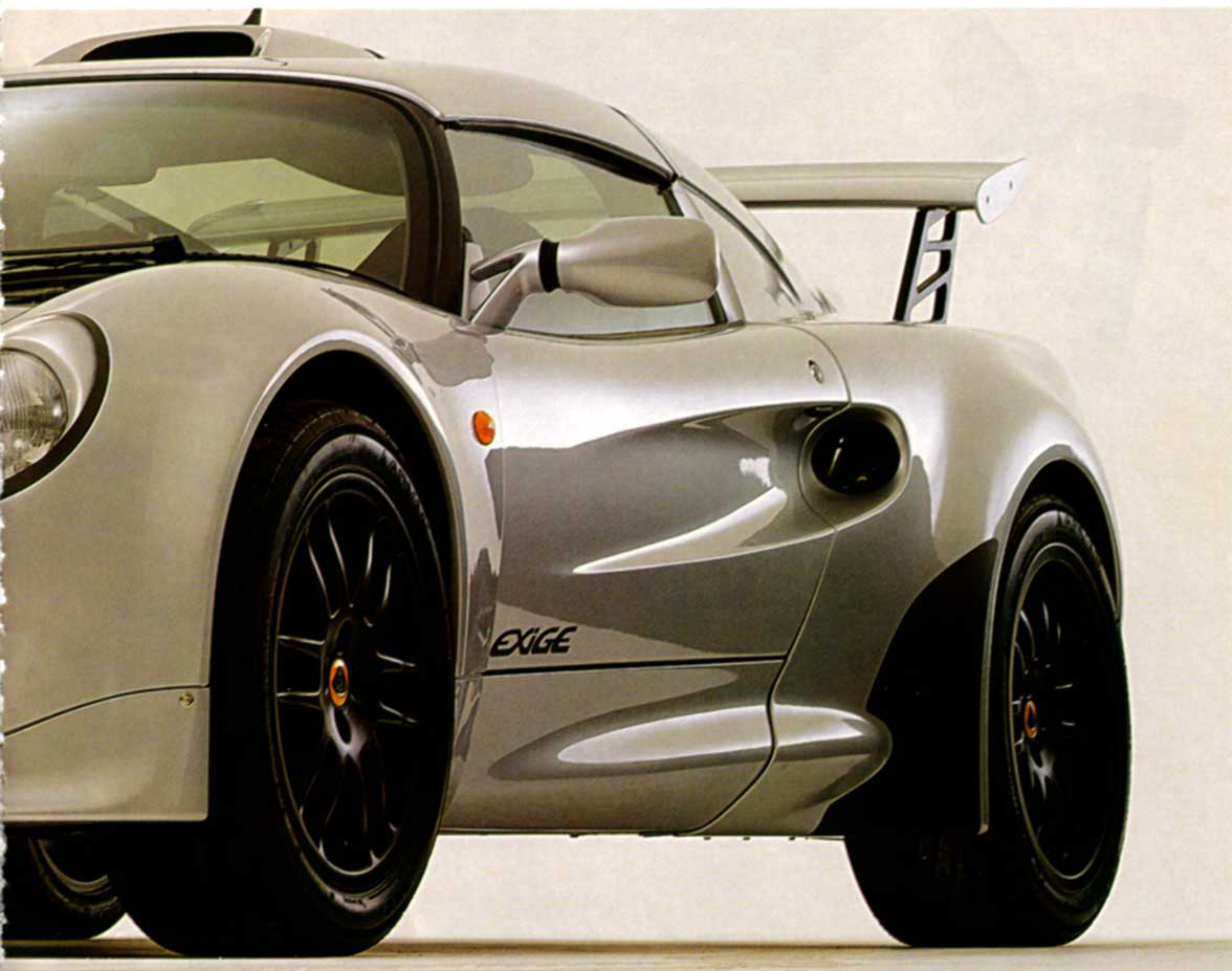
17 Ferrari 550 Maranello convertible planned



19 Tuner Brabus boosts Smart to 70bhp



20 Nissan design chief reveals new direction



gets go-ahead

out-accelerate any other road-going Elise, with 0-100mph in 12.3sec. Order books open now

the car practical for road use.

At the front, the racer's apron and splitter assembly has been raised to improve ramp approach angles, so you won't scrape it on speed bumps. Also, European homologation regulations demanded that the racer's huge wing was replaced with a smaller version, which

Lotus says offers aerodynamic characteristics more appropriate for road use. Its effects are by no means purely visual, however – Lotus says it helps generate 45kg of additional downforce at 100mph, keeping the rear end glued to the tarmac on fast, sweeping bends and improving high-speed stability. The aerody-

amic package at the front of the car accounts for 35kg of downforce at 100mph.

Also at the front, the Exige features six-inch diameter dipped beam light units behind aerodynamic perspex fairings, with the main beam units mounted low either side of the air intake.

The new coupe's most sig-

nificant visual departure from the Sport Elise is that the solid rear roof panel has been replaced with a polycarbonate tailgate set into a composite moulding.

As well as improving rearward visibility, the polycarbonate window also hinges upwards to allow access to a reduced luggage space,

which sits behind the engine.

The racer's striking snorkel-style air intake on the roof is retained, forcing air into the engine bay, which is also ventilated by new cooling outlets in the tailgate. This modification reflects the likelihood of even track-bred road cars spending much of their life snarled in traffic. ♦

Wing smaller than track car's, but still provides downforce



The aggressive wide wheel arch treatment which gives the Sport Elise its muscular haunches has also been carried over, but the race car's vents behind the rear wheels have been deleted for a smooth flare, while the track machine's one-piece lift-off rear clamshell has also gone.

The car's swoopy wheel arch flares are necessary to cover the 7Jx16in front and 8.5Jx17in rear wheels, all of which are shod with unique Yokohama A039 tyres. Lotus says these were specially developed to ensure maximum grip and to meet its renowned ride and handling

performance criteria. Tyre sizes are 195/50 ZR16 and 225/45 ZR17 at the front and rear respectively.

The Exige retains the Sport Elise's basic suspension layout. Fully independent front and rear double-wishbone systems have co-axial coil springs mounted on adjustable platforms. There are Koni monotube racing dampers, an adjustable-link front stabiliser bar, and extruded aluminium front and forged steel rear uprights.

The suspension has been retuned for road use, with new spring and damper rates.

The super-sensitive rack-and-pinion steering has a 15.8:1 ratio and takes just 2.3 turns from lock to lock.

Braking is catered for by 282mm diameter cross-drilled ventilated discs at the front and rear. There is no servo assistance for the brake pedal, which activates AP Racing opposed-piston front calipers and Brembo single-piston sliding rear calipers, with a cable-operated parking brake mechanism.

The four-cylinder K-series engine features a front-mounted oil cooler and produces its 177bhp at 7800rpm, thanks to a management



Original Elise concept is taken further and faster by new Exige



Exige features smaller splitter than race car. Roof scoop feeds air to mid-mounted powerplant



Wheels wear specially developed Yokohama rubber. AP and Brembo provide the stopping power

system developed by Lotus. Maximum torque of 126lb ft arrives at 5000rpm, and the engine drives through a close-ratio gearbox. A final drive ratio of 4.20 gives a quoted top speed of 136mph.

The Exige is already quick, but Lotus acknowledges that it is easily capable of harnessing more power and points out that factory tuning kits are available to take power to almost 200bhp.

While the race car's cockpit has a single centrally mounted seat for the driver and no provision at all for passengers, the Exige reverts to a traditional two-abreast

seating plan. Lotus says it did consider keeping the central driving position for road models but in the end decided owners would want to share the thrills the car provides. The cabin is rudimentary – the passenger seat is fixed and only the driver gets fore and aft adjustment.

Otherwise the cabin is pretty much standard Elise, but with a roof – which is higher than might be expected because it has to provide room for a racing driver's helmeted head.

Electrical service components and the engine management controller are fixed to

the cockpit's rear bulkhead, originally for accessibility on the racing version. Lotus says the road car components will be protected from theft or tampering.

Standard equipment will include an alarm and immobiliser, an in-car entertainment fitting kit, including all wiring, a roof-mounted aerial and speaker mounts. The options list includes four-point racing seatbelt harnesses with an additional cross-car beam mounting system, competition-style seats with trim inserts and colours matched to the door trim panels and steering wheel.

The Exige goes into production this summer, and will be available in all European markets. The car will be built to order and run through the normal Elise roadster production line, which it will also share with Vauxhall's forthcoming VX220.

Lotus is moving all Elise-based car production to a new line this summer, with a capacity of 10,000 a year. As the wait for an Elise roadster is currently down to a manageable four months, eager Exige buyers should not have to wait long for their orders to be fulfilled.

Chris Rosamond

DRIVING IT

This new Lotus may have a completely ridiculous name but the concept of the Exige is spot-on.

Not everyone is in love with open cars, and some actually prefer a roof over the head. I'm one of them.

Driving the Elise Sport racing car (below) gives you a perfect idea of what the new road car will feel like to sit in and to drive. If you've driven an Elise with a hard-top fitted you'll have a pretty accurate impression of it.

It's easy to conjure up Le Mans fantasies in the closed Lotus. It's small and neat and easy to place on the road. The Elise interior is so basic that little needed to be done to turn it into a racing car, and the bare minimum will have to be altered to make the Exige's cabin sporty.

The big difference between the Exige and the Elise will be the



aerodynamic advantages that come with the new car's rear wing and revised tail section. Both will make the car much more aerodynamically stable than the standard Elise. You can actually feel the downforce in the racer. It will make a brilliant track car, especially with 200bhp and even more so if you pinch a few parts from the racing car.

The Exige may sound something like a new brand of high-powered washing-liquid, but we're certain it will become one of Lotus' greats.

Colin Goodwin