



LOTUS'S OTHER GT

The Eagle is still several months away, but don't forget the Europa, the other 'everyday' Lotus, just revised. **Steve Cropley** sees if it deserves to be remembered

PHOTOGRAPHY STUART PRICE

Sitting in the new Lotus Europa, my backside less than a foot off the road as the Scottish scenery blurred towards me, I enjoyed chewing on the notion that Jim Clark, the Scottish double F1 world champion (who remains one of my greatest heroes 40 years after his death), must have traversed these roads countless times. Even at the height of his fame, Clark was fastidious about maintaining his Scottish roots, and he drove frequently back and forth from Lotus's base in Norfolk to the family farm near Duns in the Scottish borders.

To tell the truth, this imagined relationship to Clark was the reason I was on these Border roads at all. The task at hand was to evaluate a lightly (but cleverly) improved version of the Lotus Europa, the

Elise-based, glass-backed coupé powered by a turbocharged Vauxhall engine from the VX220. Since the car was always intended to be better at long distances than its Elise and Exige siblings, what better way to evaluate it than on the heritage trail from Hethel to Duns?

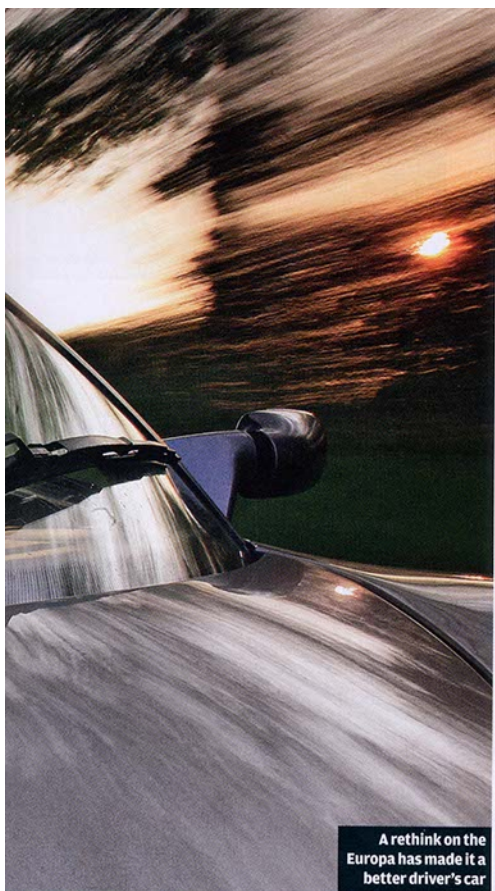
The Europa has been around since 2006, but despite its impressive pedigree and power, we found that the original S-model did not match Lotus's usual standards as a driver's car.

Since then, however, Roger Becker, Lotus's hugely experienced engineering director (who learned much of his trade directly from Colin Chapman), has devised a number of strategic updates for the car. Our test vehicle was the first fully finished prototype.

Instead of the old Europa S, we now have a two-tier Europa range: Europa and Europa

SE. Both get revised suspension rates and wheel/tyre sizes, recalibrated (Lotus-spec) engine management that delivers both more grunt and zestier response, a programme to reduce wind and road noise, an optional all-leather interior, minor changes to the exterior (including adjustment of the all-important 'stance') and a big rethink on pricing. The entry-level Europa now looks decent value at £27,950, but the one you'll want is the comprehensively equipped SE we tested; it gets lightweight wheels, wider tyres, an all-hide interior, bigger AP Racing brakes, a more powerful hi-fi and sets you back a still respectable £32,995.

For me, these things change the Europa equation, which is why I chose it for my Jim Clark journey close to the 40th anniversary of his sad demise. The Europa S struck trouble largely because of the way it was



A rethink on the Europa has made it a better driver's car

Revised Lotus Europa | Drive

described, but let's ignore the claims and weigh up the ingredients instead.

You get a sophisticated car of the finest sporting pedigree – more comfortable and quieter than an Elise, but with its handling restored to Becker's high standards. It weighs under 1000kg but is powered by an impressively meaty 2.0-litre turbo engine packing 223bhp and 221lb ft. The second figure is the impressive one; it gives the Europa SE a torque-to-weight ratio almost identical to that of a Ferrari F430, which is one good reason why Lotus can claim such deeply impressive performance figures: 0-60mph in 5.5sec, 0-100mph in an even 13sec, top speed just over 140mph.

Google Maps reckoned my trip would be 365 miles long and take between six and seven hours. Since at the other end I was planning to meet Ian Scott-Watson, Jimmy Clark's legendary friend and mentor, for a convivial dinner with some of his (and JC's) friends, I presented myself at Hethel bright and early. I chatted for a few minutes with Becker and CEO Mike Kimberley about the Europa's improvements, prospects and objectives (the company wants to sell 500 Europas a year, a sensible objective) and then it was time to go.

If you judge a car of Europa format against conventional long-distance cruisers, it will always come off second best. Yet I found it brilliant. It's all about your mindset. First off, there's excitement in sliding your rump across the wide still and down into the thinly padded, leather bucket seat. It's so →



Only 365 miles to Duns from Lotus HQ



Downloading Becker's Europa vision



...and it does, with open, empty A-roads

'The soaring straights and super-quick bends of the A697 demonstrate the Europa's brilliant steering accuracy'



Drive | Revised Lotus Europa

← much better than tamely opening a door and getting in. So what if you have to duck your head and wriggle about a bit? Once you're installed the car fits like a glove, compact wheel in your lap, longish gear lever right beside it.

Push the starter button and you'll discover a throaty engine that seems a little more remote than an Elise's, and as soon as you're off the mark you're conscious that the Europa is much longer-g geared, yet stronger in the mid-range. Such things make progress effortless.

By the time we were established on the M1, 100 miles from Hethel, I had constructed a list of advantages of day-long journeys in a car like this.

First, the firm and body-fitting seats, devoid of 'springing', are fundamentally comfortable. Second, a seating position down among the wheels means that body motions don't move you about as they do in a higher saloon or especially an SUV.

Your race-bred steering, brakes and chassis grip have such huge reserves in ordinary open-road driving that you need barely half their reserve. And the torquey turbo engine has so much low-rev grunt that on A and B-roads you can easily slingshot past slow traffic three at a time, often without even changing down.

The M1 was boring, but we had finished with it soon after lunch, having turned 30mpg to the first refuelling stop, after 220 miles, without trying. A quick call to Ian S-W caused me to ditch the original Google plan to follow the A1 to Berwick-upon-Tweed then turn left for Chirnside and Duns. Far better, he advised, to peel off the A1 just north of Morpeth and take the more sinuous and interesting A697 to Coldstream, then the even better A6112 into Duns.

Ian and his friend would be waiting outside the Jim Clark Room, the modest but deeply impressive, council-maintained museum in which many of Clark's trophies repose, along with artefacts from his remarkable racing career.

To me, the moving thing about that place is to appreciate the homespun nature of Clark's early achievements, as a young farmer simply having fun with friends. Much of the time he drove Scott-Watson's thoughtfully chosen cars: DKWs, a Porsche 365, then a succession of Lotuses.

Clark's supreme skills emerged artlessly, aided by the selfless help of Scott-Watson, also a hero in my eyes, who knew very early that his friend had something very special. Clark was so much better than the rest of them – even the decent ones – that the margin would not be disguised. Within



Reason for the trip was a visit to Jim Clark country, Scotland



Paying tribute; hero Clark was killed 40 years ago this year



Crisp steering makes revamped Europa a delight to drive

Europa uses turbo
Vauxhall power; hits
0-60mph in 5.5sec





Humble Jim Clark museum is great; Scott-Watson's collection of images (below) is even better



'By the time I'd driven back I'd learned what inputs the Lotus needed, so I was providing those and nothing else'

a couple of years he was racing a D-type Jaguar. Within four he was a grand prix star. Within six he was winning grands prix.

In a car like the Europa, you leave the A1 and head for Coldstream with a rightful sense of expectation. The soaring straights and long, super-quick bends of the A697 demonstrate the Lotus's brilliant steering accuracy and stability, and increase your challenge, as does the task of watching for killjoy speed cameras. Beyond Coldstream on the A6112 you understand why such enthusiasm for cars and driving, and for motorsport of all kinds, has grown up in this comparatively underpopulated place.

By southern standards, this is a drivers' paradise. The A6112 is little trafficked on weekdays, wide enough to take a line through every corner, and its surface is impeccable. The corners vary in radius, presenting constant braking and gearchanging challenges, but you can see them coming. Get to the end of that 12-mile sprint into Duns and your instinct is to turn around and do it again straight away. I kept thinking of young Jimmy and his carefree set in the late 1950s and very early '60s; how they must have loved driving in this place.

Scott-Watson and two friends were waiting outside the Clark Room, but by the

time I'd arrived it was closed. So we toured the local sites associated with Jim Clark (the churchyard and memorial clock in nearby Chirnside, the farm at Edington Mains) and then we had a convivial dinner in a nearby pub, resolving to be back at the Clark Room the next morning.

Ian also invited me to his house to view a wonderful Clark picture collection, most of the images never published. It was the highlight of the journey.

I drove the Europa back to Hethel as quickly as traffic, speed cameras and the forces of the law would allow. By then we were allies, friends; I had learned what inputs it needed and was enjoying providing those and nothing else. It was powerful, quick to respond, firm but supple, and its unpadded seats were amazingly comfortable. Deep upholstery, I decided, is sometimes the enemy of comfort.

Giving the Europa back was the worst thing. I'd have cheerfully taken it on to London and used it for commuting. Or sought another far-flung destination. This may not quite be the 'businessman's express' as originally labelled, but this new edition is still a fine long-distance car for the driver who understands it. You may not be cosseted, but you're never, ever bored.