



The Lotus Esprit S2 is a much-improved version of the original Esprit. But for those who want a really exclusive car Lotus produced a limited number of the Esprit World Champion to commemorate Mario Andretti's and the marque's wins in the 1978 World Championships for drivers and constructors. Barry Lake drove the car and became . . .

WORLD CHAMPION FOR A DAY



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THE LOTUS Esprit is a sensational looking car. And if your own eyes don't confirm that for you, then you only have to take it for a drive and see the way it stops pedestrians and other road users alike.

The car has been a sales success for Lotus largely on the score of looks and exclusiveness. It isn't manufactured in large numbers — about 15 or 16 a week actually — and most of these go to the US, so any owner can be reasonably sure of being the only one in his street — or maybe even town — to own one.

Capitalising on these two features, the Lotus sales people came up with the idea of a special release model to commemorate the World Championship wins by Mario Andretti (drivers') and the Lotus 79 (manufacturers') in 1978. Called, appropriately enough, *World Champion*, the car has a similar black with gold striping colour scheme to the John Player-sponsored Lotus cars.

Each car has its own serial number emblazoned on its flanks, adding further to its exclusive nature.

A great sales lurk in the US, the scheme has fallen a little flat here because by the time the first car reached our shores, the Andretti/Lotus championship wins were all but forgotten as the team wallowed mid-field in the 1979 grands prix. Not only that, but the team cars are now painted dark green and carry Martini sponsorship so that link, too, has gone.

None of this detracts in any way from the Lotus Esprit S2 *World Champion*. It is a superb car to drive. It lives up to its appearance in every way — with the possible exception of straight line performance. This is a relevant thing, however. Most people, climbing into it from an everyday car, would find its performance exhilarating. Owners of Jaguars, Ferraris and Lamborghinis might find it a little slow.

But, while it doesn't keep pace with some of the more exotic of Italian GP cars in sheer performance, it would give them all a shake through corners and under brakes. From point A to point B it would beat most, if the road is winding enough. On motorways — forget it. Don't make any bets.

And let's not forget that it also comes out way ahead of the big V12s and their ilk in price. Prices on such cars are very hard to keep track of — the most recent batch of Lotus Esprits were selling at around the \$34,000 mark but we are told



the current batch will be past the \$40,000 barrier.

The distributors weren't able to give us a firm price on the *World Champion* but you are sure to have a lot of change left over from the 55 grand upwards you have to have on tap to start talking to Ferrari and Lamborghini dealers.

When you're talking prices, the car which comes the closest to the Esprit in price is the base-model Porsche 911. In acceleration and top speed the Esprit is a little ahead and it handles and stops a good deal better.

But we venture to add that performance wouldn't sway buyers one way or the other on these two cars. We'd suspect they'd appeal to totally different personalities. A Porsche has become accepted as an *in* car for the monied among us; the Lotus would appeal more to the playboy type — as well, we hasten to add, as the man who buys it purely for its driveability.

He is the buyer who would really be getting his money's worth and the Lotus is more exclusive, too.

The Esprit's racing heritage is obvious as soon as you step over the broad sills and slide down into its bucket seat.

The cloth-inserted, leather-sided seats hold you a lot better than the all-leather, flatter-backed versions in the

older S1. The soft-rimmed steering wheel is well placed and the pedals, though a little closer to the driver than we'd like, are well placed for all of the functions required of fast, efficient driving. Yet, for all that, they are not so close together that you need special shoes to drive it. There is more footroom, for instance, than you find in the Alfasud Sprint we tested recently.

High up on the centre console, on which you can rest your arm while using it, is the short lever which operates the five-speed gearbox.

This gearbox was originally designed for the front-drive Maserati-engined Citroen SM, although you could be excused for thinking it was made especially for the Esprit. It is a delight to use.

If you are an old sports car fan from way back you might at first be alarmed at not being able to feel your way into gears along an imaginary "gate", but once you've come to grips with the fact that the gears *are* where they are supposed to be and you just pop the lever in, the lack of feel is more than offset by the smooth and slick operation of the mechanism.

The Lotus aluminium-block, two-litre, four-cylinder, twin overhead camshaft engine is a little stifled by the pollution gear (we are forced to have a strict US-style unit as the European one won't pass our local design regs and our market is too small to develop a special tune for our purpose) but pushes the little car along in healthy fashion nonetheless.

Acceleration, both from a standing start and at overtaking speeds, is rapid by most standards as can be seen from our specifications panel.

Getting the car away from rest is a bit of a trick, though. First gear is very high and the car tends to falter if you try a normal

start ... particularly embarrassing around town when it requires an extra try to get it off the mark. On the test strip it was immediately obvious that a little clutch slip wasn't going to get the car underway in a hurry. There was only one way. You had to give it lots of revs — about 5000 — and drop the clutch.

The car is racing bred and you have to treat it as such. When you drive it like that the excellent Dunlop SP Sport rear tyres, big as they are for the weight of the car, break traction. The car gives a snake sideways and you are slung up the road as from a slingshot.

And it's fun, too!

The only problem is you can't use this

method around town. The school kids love it; old people and police don't. You just have to learn which number of revs and which amount of clutch slip gets it away smoothly and undramatically.

This doesn't mean the engine is cranky and intractable. Surprisingly, the Esprit can drop to a very slow speed, even in second gear, and pull away smoothly. If you owned the car you would become adept, we're sure, at judging traffic lights so you didn't have to actually come to a dead stop. That way you would always be able to pull away smoothly and easily.

The Esprit really comes into its own on an open, winding road. We took "our" car out into the hills for the day and indulged

in the sheer pleasure of sweeping and swooping through all manner of bends and corners.

The handling was first class. It is hard to imagine any road car which reacts more like a true racing car than does the Esprit. Understeer can be provoked; so too can oversteer. You can virtually place the car any way you like and it never fights back.

It is just so responsive you begin to imagine yourself on a race circuit. What fun it would be to drive it on the original Nurburgring — or around Bathurst for that matter.

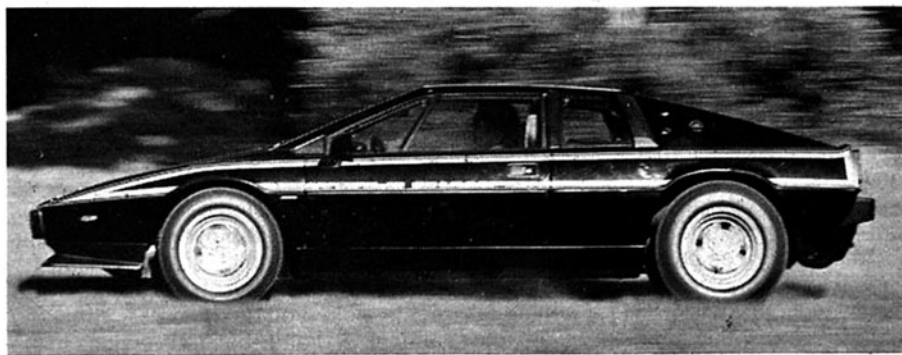
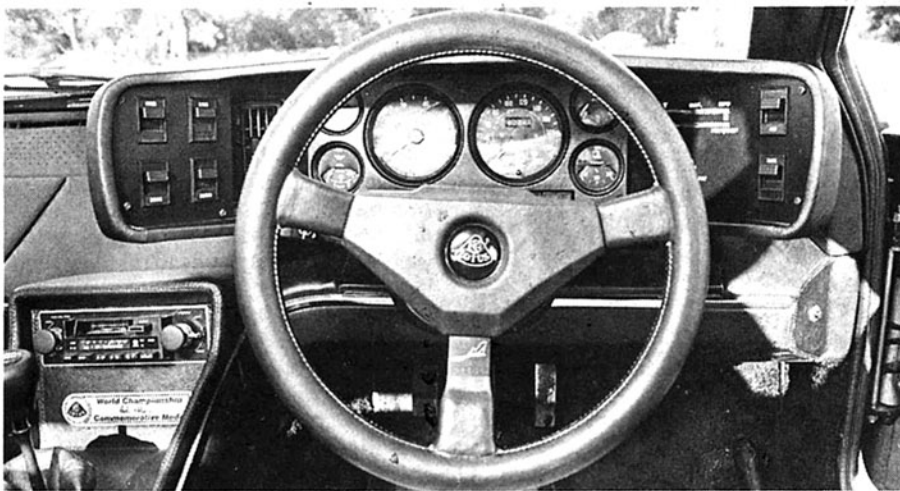
You would almost need to own two Lotus Esprits — one to keep as a collector's car, another to run in club motor racing. Club racing because that way you could retain the car's original character without having to fit it with wide wheels and racing slicks and modify the engine until it is no longer tractable.

The car is so enjoyable to drive it can be forgiven for its faults. The engine is noisy and harsh. Four cylinders are never smooth and alloy-block four-cylinders are even less so because of the higher ratio of moving parts, by weight, to stationary parts.

That busily buzzing little unit is right in there behind the driver's back, amidships, with a noise and vibration situation which is hard to hide. There is very little but a glass window and a fibreglass wall between it and the occupants. Even so, few enthusiast owners will let it worry them.

The other frequent complaint with Lotus cars is the lack of quality control in their production. We have heard of unhappy owners having many minor but irritating problems, but the car we drove appeared to be well assembled and certainly gave no hint of its ancestry like Lotus Sevens; Europas and Elans which — in that order — were rather hurriedly and carelessly thrown together.

By comparison, the Esprit has come a long way. The S2 is, in fact, a great step forward from the S1. The factory is working hard in this direction all the time,



and not without need, for those earlier cars gave a reputation which might be hard to shake off.

In the Elan/Europa days, Lotus sales were up to around 4,500 units per annum. It is now about one-third of that figure. The Elans and Europas sold well because of their high performance/ cost ratio but they tired quickly and became rather tatty as used cars and people don't forget those things quickly.

As an example of the type of detailed improvements Lotus puts into its cars, the S2 has been uprated from the S1 in a number of areas. The steering has been improved by fitting a ball race in place of the former bush on the steering column.

Handling has also come in for attention with a wider front track, derived from added offset to the wheel hubs, and stiffer front shock absorbers.

Aerodynamics have been looked at and the fared-in front spoiler gives more negative lift at the front than did the old bolt-on type.

Visibility is as before — not good, but then not all that bad, either, for a car of this type. The windscreen pillars are very wide and can block vision of the apex on very tight corners. In normal driving they don't seem to be much bother.

Rearward vision is looked after by two door mirrors which are adjusted electrically by switches on the driver's door. With these correctly adjusted and the occasional quick look over the shoulder through the rear quarter windows you are seldom caught out.

Parking, too, was easier than expected even though it is difficult to judge exactly the front and rear extremities. Hopefully, one would learn where they are eventually, without hitting too many other cars in the meantime.

The flat rear window between occupants and rear luggage area (around the engine bay) does cause reflections as with the rear windows and this is occasionally worrying but, all in all, the standard of vision is at least up to that of similar cars.

The Lotus Esprit is an enthusiast's car and enthusiasts are known to put up with minor hardships in order to get the performance they desire. When you think of the people who have in the past owned open sports cars with little weather protection, stiff suspension, parts which fell off with great regularity and indifferent reliability, the Lotus Esprit gives the modern enthusiast far more fun (for all but the real masochists) for far less inconvenience.

In short, a real fun car to own and to drive.



LOTUS ESPRIT S2 ROAD TEST DATA

As tested

ENGINE

Location	Mid-rear
Cylinders	Four
Bore x Stroke	95.2 x 69.2 mm
Capacity	1973 cc
Carburation	Two Zenith sidedraught
Compression Ratio	8.4 to 1
Fuel Pump	Electric
Valve Gear	16 Valve Twin OHC
Claimed Power	104 kW at 5800 rpm
Claimed Torque	177 Nm at 4000 rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type	Five-speed manual
Driving Wheels	Rear
Clutch	Single dry plate
Gearbox ratios	
First	2.92
Second	1.94
Third	1.32
Fourth	0.97
Fifth	0.76
Final Drive Ratio	4.375

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent by unequal length wishbones, coil springs, and anti-roll bar.
Rear	Independent by lower transverse links, fixed-length driveshafts, semi-trailing arms and coil springs.
Shock Absorbers	Telescopic
Wheels	Alloy 7.0 JK x 14 (front) 7.5 JK x 14 (rear)
Tyres	205/60 VR x 14 (front) 205/70 VR x 14 (rear)

BRAKES

Front	250 mm discs
Rear	275 mm discs

STEERING

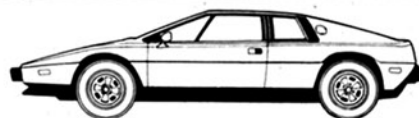
Type	Rack and pinion
Turns, Lock to Lock	2.8
Turning Circle	10.8 metres

DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT

Wheelbase	2440 mm
Front Track	1511 mm
Rear Track	1537 mm
Overall Length	4190 mm
Overall Width	1860 mm
Overall Height	1110 mm
Ground Clearance	152 mm
Kerb Weight	1022 kg

CAPACITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Fuel Tank	67 litres
Cooling System	n/a
Engine Sump	n/a



Battery	12 V 44Ah
Alternator	55 A

CALCULATED DATA

Weight to Power	9.8 kg/kW
Specific Power Output	52.7 kW/litre

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Average for Test	14.1 litres/100 km
Best Recorded	14.1 litres/100 km

ACCELERATION

0-60 km/h	3.8 seconds
0-80 km/h	6.7 seconds
0-100 km/h	8.8 seconds
0-110 km/h	11.4 seconds
0-120 km/h	12.2 seconds
0-130 km/h	13.9 seconds

OVERTAKING TIMES

50-80 km/h	3rd	4th
60-100 km/h	5.7s	n/a
	6.7s	13.0s

STANDING 400 METRES

Average	16.7 seconds
Best Recorded	16.5 seconds

SPEED IN GEARS

First	64 km/h
Second	97 km/h
Third	142 km/h
Fourth	193 km/h
Fifth	(Claimed) 222 km/h

THE FIVE-STAR TEST

Comfort	(4)
Handling	(5)
Brakes	(5)
Performance	(4)
Quietness	(2)
Luggage Capacity	(2)

CHECKLIST

Adjustable steering	No
Carpets	Yes
Cigarette lighter	Yes
Clock	Yes
Day/Night mirror	Yes
Hazard flashers	Yes
Heated rear window	Yes
Laminated screen	Yes
Petrol filler lock	No
Radio	Yes
Tachometer	Yes
Intermittent wipers	Yes
Rear window wiper	No

The facts speak for themselves.

- ... **on safety.** Lotus exceeds most European and American safety requirements. Winner of the prestigious Don Safety Award for all round safety excellence.
- ... **on economy.** Around 25 m.p.g. around town. Up to 38 m.p.g. touring.
- ... **on performance.** The 2 litre Lotus 907 engine is all alloy in construction with four valves per cylinder. Capable of 100 m.p.h. in 20.7 seconds and a top speed of 136 m.p.h. Front disc brakes and rear inboard drums work in tandem with pressure sensor failure warning. A choice of 5 speed manual or 3 speed automatic transmission.
- ... **on styling.** Lotus' impact resistant GFRP body is as stylish as it is functional. The interior is pure luxury. Fully reclining seats, air conditioning, electric windows, and exterior mirrors, marquette trim are just a few Lotus features.
- ... **on the record books.** Lotus have more World Champion Constructor titles than any other manufacturer, and are the current title holders.

ANYTHING LESS THAN LOTUS EFFICIENCY IS PURE EXTRAVAGANCE.



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33 Buffalo Road, Gladesville
Telephone 80 4111.

QLD.: Excel Motors
3084 Gold Coast H'wy, Surfers Paradise
Telephone 38 5866.

W.A.: Halberts Motors P.L.
104 Swan Street, Guildford
Telephone 279 4200.

TAS.: Performance Automobiles
269 Davey Street, Hobart
Telephone 23 2711.



Lotus

Australian Distributor - James Smith Motor Imports.