

DRIVEN

TRACK TERROR LOTUS EXIGE S

STORY COLUM WOOD PHOTOS DAVID PRATTE & LOTUS

WE HIT THE CORNERS IN **LOTUS' TOP PERFORMER**



There is only one place to properly drive a Lotus, and that is on a race track. Hence, when Lotus Cars USA unveiled their latest and greatest Exige S, they took over the unnamed road course located next to the Las Vegas Motor Speedway and gave the press a full Lotus experience.

Having had a few laps on the course (back with the Koenigsegg CCX), I felt a lot more comfortable this time round. Wrecking a Lotus also won't put you back to the tune of \$700,000.

To ease everyone into the 220 hp supercharged go-kart, Lotus first offered

a ride-along in an Elise with an instructor who gave an incredibly thorough breakdown of the track, including what gears to be in at what corners, etc. After a few laps by myself I felt comfortable with the Lotus and was eager to receive an instant boost in power.

Colin Price, Lotus' PR head, was kind enough to accommodate a few journalists who, like myself, were unable to attend the entire event because of the SEMA Show. When I arrived at the track mid-afternoon, the sun already showed hints of setting and by the time I revved up the Toyota-sourced 1.8L engine in my

Exige S – the desert was slowly turning a deep orange. This really set the Chrome Orange paint of my tester on fire.

Weighing in at only 2,057 lbs, as I applied the throttle the light-weight British sports car took off at a modest pace – much better than the Elise but still nothing overly breathtaking. Despite the addition of a supercharger, which allows for 80 percent of the car's 160 ft-lbs of torque to be developed below 2000 rpm, the small engine still only develops real power above 6000. And when I hit that mark on the tachometer, I could feel a smile creeping up in the corners of my mouth.



PLUS

- Intuitive response
- Superb brakes
- Surprisingly nice interior



MINUS

- Supercharged Toyota engine
- Blindspots
- Tight squeeze for two



It's as though they hooked the car up to your brain.



DRIVEN

The point of this car, however, is not the straight-line acceleration, but rather the complete track package. (In fact, because of the aerodynamics the stock Exige is actually slower than the Elise in most straight-line runs). The extra horsepower in the Exige S, however, helps to rectify this situation, as the Zero-60 time elapses in 4.1 seconds (compared to the Elise's 4.6).

With a set of sticky Advan A048 tires and a brilliantly designed chassis and suspension, the Lotus epitomizes what a sports car should feel like. As one individual said, "It's as though they hooked the car up to your brain." It's really that good!

It didn't hurt that my tester came equipped with a \$1,790 LSD and traction control package, as well as a \$2,495 'Track Pack' which includes adjustable Bilstein shocks and a five-way adjustable front sway bar.

But even with the LSD, as I slid through corners and powered out the other end, it was important to be easy on the throttle. Unlike the Elise, you can't just lay the hammer down at every apex; this is a vehicle that demands respect.

It is somewhat shocking that the blower only ads about 30 horsepower. One wonders why Lotus didn't simply opt for a Honda sourced K-Series motor (think RSX or TSX) that could produce the same amount of power without forced induction.

Back on the track the Exige really showed its hand on the straights. Whereas the Elise managed only the top of third gear, the Exige S made significant use of fourth. Pushing deep into every corner was a definite possibility, as the aerodynamics provide confidence at maximum speed and the incredible brakes keep you on the track – even when you think you're committed to using the front splitter to do some Zen Gardening of the Nevada desert.

Compared to the stock Exige, the aerodynamics on the S remain unchanged for the most part, including the front and rear spoilers which work to create 90.64 lbs of downforce at 100 mph. One of the few differences is the increased size of the roof scoop which now works to feed the intercooler. The brakes, which measure 11.5-inches all around with two piston

1. AS THE SUN SET, THE ADVAN SUPPORT TRUCK PROVIDED ALL THE LIGHTING NECESSARY.

2. THE RACE INSPIRED 16-INCH FRONT WHEELS WITH AP RACING BRAKES.

3. THE PROXIMITY OF THE SHIFTER TO THE STEERING WHEEL IS ANOTHER REASON THIS IS A PURE DRIVER'S CAR.

4. THE TESTER CAME WITH A \$1,350 TOURING PACK WHICH INCLUDES LEATHER SEATS.

1





2



3



4

Q&A WITH NEIL RATNAVIRA

From Sector111

MLE spoke with Neil Ratnavira from the well-known Lotus tuning shop Sector111, to get his feedback on the new Exige S and find out what kind of aftermarket parts might be coming down the pipe.



MLE: What do you like most about the Exige S?

Neil: I like the added torque down low. It is just what the doc ordered. I like the fact that the variable valve timing isn't as sudden as the standard car. The cam switch over is much more linear than the standard car. Last but not least I love the sound the supercharger makes when you are in the car.

MLE: What areas do you feel the Exige S is lacking?

Neil: The S is a very good car out of the box, although I think if the car were lighter it would be even better. Another thing... is the lack of a nice exhaust note. I like cars that sound as fast as they go. Listening to the Exige S from track-side was a bit disappointing, I expected [to hear] a wailing supercharger. I also think the Exige S could use some better brake pads.

MLE: What modifications will you be offering for the Exige S?

Neil: A lot of our current parts that we offer for the standard Exige will fit the Exige S, such as the full race or track suspension and the aero bits. We will be developing specific parts for the S model such as pulleys, ECU programs and maybe a specific Exige S weight loss program!

MLE: Why should Lotus owners choose Sector 111?

Neil: That's a simple one. We provide more quality parts for the Lotus Elise/Exige than anybody else in the world. Our customer service and knowledge of these cars are only second to Lotus Corp. One of the things we say at Sector111 is we wouldn't sell anything we wouldn't put on our personal cars.



With black wheels and one of many florescent colors to choose from, turning heads is one of this car's fortes.

LOTUS EXIGE S

ENGINE

Supercharged 1.8L inline-four with VVTL-i

DRIVETRAIN

Six-speed manual

SUSPENSION

Track Pack: Adjustable Bilstein dampers with threaded spring perches and remote front reservoirs, five-way adjustable front anti-sway bar, safety harness mounting bar behind seats

WHEELS, TIRES, BRAKES

(F) 16x6.5-inch seven-spoke forged alloy wheels with 195/50/16 Advan A048 tires, AP Racing two-piston calipers with 288mm (11.5-inch) rotors; (R) 17x7.5-inch seven-spoke forged alloy wheels with 225/45/17 Advan A048 tires, Brembo single-piston calipers with 288mm (11.5-inch) rotors

INTERIOR

Touring pack: Leather seats and door panels, electric windows, upgraded stereo, stowage net, additional sound insulation, full carpet set and additional sound and thermal soft top insulation; Leather-trimmed Momo steering wheel; air conditioning; starter button; remote power locks

EXTERIOR

Aerodynamic bodywork for increased downforce includes: front splitter, sculpted hardtop, engine bay cover, rear wing, diffuser and side scoops; hand-laid composite fiberglass body; aluminum alloy fuel filler door

EXTRA

Limited slip differential with Lotus traction control, Star Shield paint protection

NUMBERS

Horsepower: 220 @ 8000 rpm

Torque: 165 @ 5500 rpm

Zero-60: 4.1 sec.

Top Speed: 148 mph

60-zero Stopping: 109 ft

Fuel Economy: City 23 / Highway 29

Weight: 2,077 lbs.

MSRP: \$56,990 (\$64,820 as tested)



calipers up front and single pistons in the rear, sit inside front 16-inch and rear 17-inch wheels.

So it's great on the track, but would you really want to drive one to the office every day? It depends.

Chances are, if you're the type of driver that prefers the amenities and luxuries of a German sedan, this isn't for you (at least not as a daily driver), however, if you're the kind of guy that really appreciates a Lotus, driving it in traffic won't bother you all that much anyway.

I do suggest the \$1,350 'Touring Pack,' which includes leather seats and door panels, electric windows, and an upgraded stereo with an iPod hookup.

But before you go out and throw your money down, there are two other small things you should be aware of: the rear

blindspots are enormous, which is bad for both the track and for daily driving, and there is no power steering, which is pretty irrelevant on a race track, but quite noticeable in a parking lot.

This isn't to say that such a track-ready car can't make for a daily driver, in fact, many of the track derived attributes of the Exige S lend themselves to the road.

The looks are certain to impress. With black wheels and one of many florescent colors to chose from, turning heads is one of this car's fortes. Even those who don't particularly like the design must admit its nice to look at something original.

Most importantly, however, is the fact that as a race track all star, the Exige S is about as perfect a toy as you can come across. **MLE**