

oneeleven*Life*

tasty digital bits for Lotus enthusiasts | July 2007



Alan Sereboff -

## LOTUS ELISE & EXIGE – SEARCHING FOR THE THREAD THAT BINDS THE CLUB – IS THE ANSWER IN A MOTTO? (part 2)

For those of you who don't know, elisetalk.com is a wonderful site founded by fellow Lotus owner and enthusiast Randy Chase back in 2003, when the Elise's arrival in the States was still just a wishful thinking, like the promise of a lesbian love scene between Angelina Jolie and Natalie Portman. Truth be told, I'm glad I hadn't discovered the site back then, as I'm kind of a "I want it now" kind of guy and the wait may have killed me as dead as Colin Chapman himself. You see, I had always been a car enthusiast, specifically a sport car enthusiast. (When I was seventeen, shortly before my Oxy/Lotus experience, I scraped enough money together to buy my first mid-engine drive, a Lancia Zagato, which met its death rather abruptly courtesy of a tree in what can best be described as a "Risky Business" moment. You remember when the scene in which the brake fell off and Cruises' father's 928S took a bath? Same thing here, except it was a tree instead of a lake. For whatever reason, I choose to go more "practical" since then.) The car I owned when I bought the Lotus was a BMW x5 4.4 SAV. The point is, I had possessed some fine vehicles, but NEVER had the thought of perusing an "ownership board" crossed my mind. I was never the guy to flash his headlights at the oncoming owners who happened to be driving the same vehicle. Why would I? They could be child molesters, for Christ's sake.

But here I was, joining an Internet site dedicated to Lotus Elise ownership. Admittedly, I felt a bit...well, pathetic. But shortly, my feelings of self-pity turned to excitement. I read about proper break-in. You could and indeed should make occasional forays into the "cams" before 1000 miles! Wow – proper "heel and toe" technique! I had heard of it, but never really knew how to do it. And, some completely obsessed bloke had even outlined a procedure for painting in the little recessed area of the shift knob so that it matched the car's interior. Well, "what rubbish," I thought. "What kind of fool would do such a thing?"

So, a couple of days and 1000 miles later, I'm sitting in the car, filling in the numbers on my shift knob with Testor's Red paint, and the thought of one thread in particular wouldn't leave my undoubtedly fractured mind. It was entitled, "Los Angeles Sunday Drive," and was authored by one "mdweaver," or Milton as his parents had named him. The post simply read,

*Los Angeles Sunday Drive -*

*meet @8:30AM / Leave @9:00AM*

*An impromptu gathering of Lotus Cars for fun drives a few hours Every Sunday Morning.*

*Interested? Show up or send a private email to me..*

*Meet at Barnes and Noble / Coffee Bean parking lot... for a Sunday Drive leaving at 9:00AM. (90 Frwy west to Lincoln right to Maxella right to Glencoe Right)*

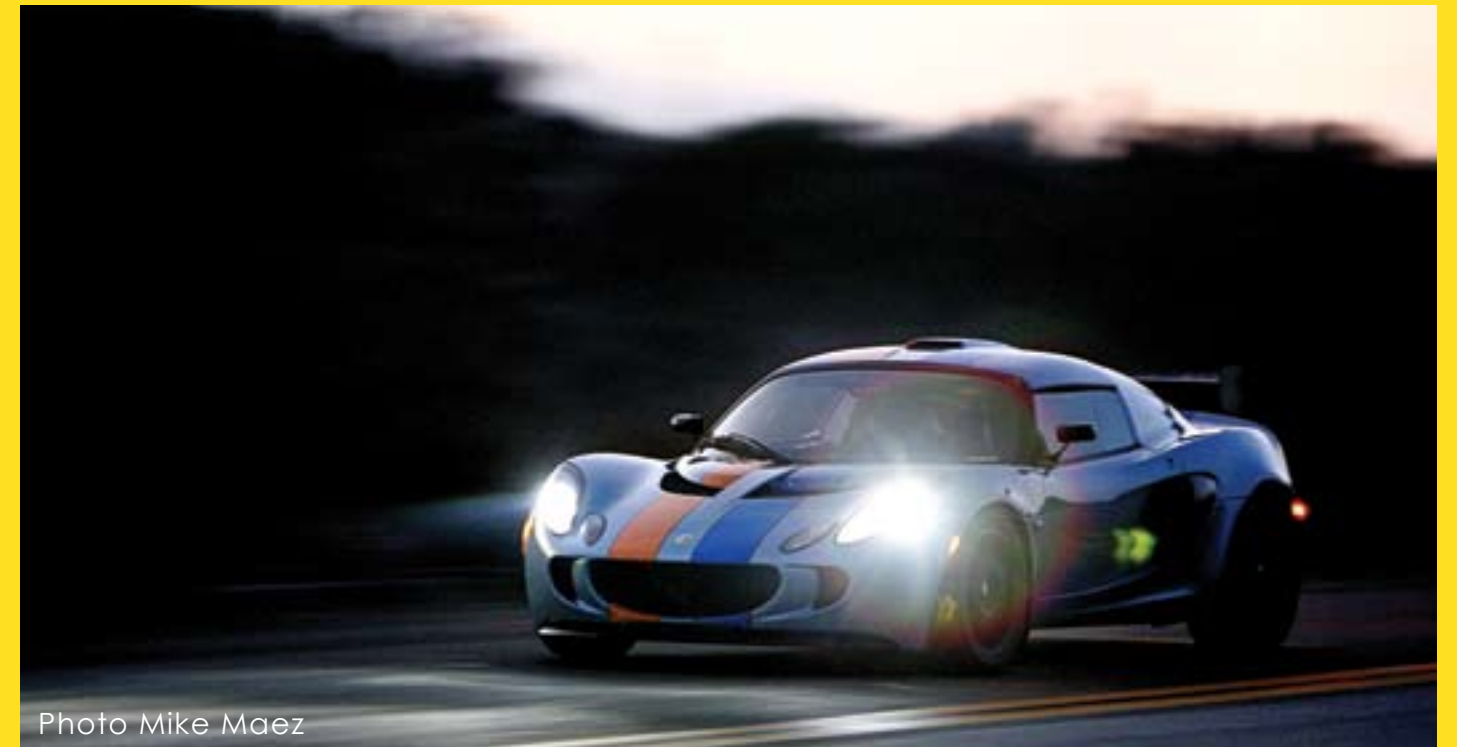


Photo Mike Maez

"Hmmm..." I thought. Seems like a good opportunity to meet some new people and stretch the legs of my new girl. I was excited, if not a bit apprehensive. I, of course, had never been in a "car club" before. I was a bit shy, and reasonably unsure about my driving ability. But, I was excited about the prospect of motoring around with a bunch of other guys who would have no doubt been left by their fiancée's too, given the choice I was.

The last time I had woken at eight am on a Sunday was in college, when some chick pierced my ear with her earring while I was passed out on a Saturday night alcoholic bender. Sure, she cleansed the area first with a Long Island Ice Tea, and sure, she sharpened her earring first with an emery board, but somehow, I awoke early Sunday with an ear the size of a golf ball and a wicked hangover. But I digress.

Eight am rang loudly on my alarm and in a dash of mad excitement I hit the shower. With equal enthusiasm I climbed in the car and set out, careful to keep it below the rev limiter until the car reached the requisite 158 degrees. I was cruising to my first Sunday drive. As it turns out, I was crashing on the way to my first Sunday drive. That's right, I never made it. Some, well, I'll be nice... other driver in a Toyota, possibly blinded by the early morning sun (he was headed east-bound) decided to cut a last minute left-hand turn, directly into the nose of my beloved Graphite Gray goddess. The impact was shattering. I remember the audible grunt I made as the airbag ejected and the seatbelt grabbed me, forcibly ejecting the air from my diaphragm. Then I went woozy. I looked up and saw the passenger from the other car, an elderly man, knocked out by the impact. I was terrified. I thought he was dead. I checked for all my body parts.

They were intact. I grabbed for my phone and promptly dialed 411. I did it twice before the cobwebs cleared and I could dial 911. I climbed out of the car and inspected the damage. A total loss. But somehow, I was for the most part, completely uninjured. Oh sure, my ribs hurt, my wrists had raspberry's from the airbags, and my coccyx bone was bruised from submarining, but relatively speaking and considering the speeds involved, I found it miraculous that I wasn't in an ambulance with my elderly friend, who ended up being okay, himself.

Equally miraculous to me was the outpouring of concern from a bunch of strangers. Strangers from elisetalk.com, and this, dear reader, finally brings me to the point of this article.

The next day, my crack...er, car dealer, Abraham Reyes from Lotus of South Bay, analyzed the crash photos and agreed that the car was a total loss. He and South Bay quickly gave me another car in anticipation of a check, which they received thirty days later. The Los Angeles Lotus Drivers Group (not an official group, but for the purposes of this article, the group exists) soon became my closest friends. They consisted of, an Asian-American Art Director, a plump stand-up comedian turned "technology entrepreneur," a post-production supervisor whose true occupation is "Seattle Seahawks/Silver Arsenal" fanatic, a fifty-something retired lawyer, a female Volcanologist turned expert driver, her father, an Engineer, an electronic importer (who insists he 's English but is not, even though his passport says

he is), an ex-patriot British technical writer, a female chemist originally from Houston, a Financial Plan Salesman, an African-American Advertising Director, a six-foot female Canadian computer game designer, a Sri Lankan-born Frenchman known as "The Stig," and an Indian-American engineer/mba/mim trained entrepreneur. I'm a Jewish screenwriter from Baltimore. I mention races and ethnicities for a reason.

We drive together. We dine together. We play brutally creative and sometimes expensive practical jokes on one another. We attend concerts together and just basically enjoy each other's company. We gather in garages and modify our cars together with the goal of squeezing every last bit of aesthetic perfection and performance excellence out of their tiny lightweight chassis. We raid Sector111.com together in search of Shinoo and Neil's latest finds like so many junkies in search of "Tasty bits." We attend track days and autocross events, together. We're there through difficult times for one another. I often wonder what, if anything, would bind this group were it not for our common ownership of a very special car. I'll explain.

I have no doubt that if I suddenly found myself stranded on a desolate corner in the center of Iraq with a single dinar in my pocket and a payphone at my disposal, any one of these people would come parachuting to my aide. That's a statement I can't make about people I've known for many years. So what is it, then? What is the common thread that binds us so closely together?

*The office's automotively savvy Car Babes (their self-chosen moniker) found Elise ridiculous and unlikely to appeal to women, especially those who favor skirts.*

— Tim Loehrke, USA TODAY

You see, we really have nothing other than the car in common. We're from different religious, economic, social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. We look different. We're different heights. We're different ages. We dress differently, with the exception of our shoes, which of course relates directly back to the driving of the car: some form of Puma Speedcat is de rigueur. We work in entirely different professions, this in itself a statistical anomaly. In my fourteen years of living in Los Angeles, ninety-nine percent of people I've counted as my friends prior to this group have worked exclusively in the entertainment industry.

We are, indeed, the Breakfast Club of Lotus ownership.

So, it's the car then. But what about the car? What is it about this tiny vehicle that binds? What is it about a car that makes me feel fortunate to have traded a marriage away for the bunch of people I consider my closest friends, with whom previously I would have thought I have absolutely nothing in common? What is it that makes me feel secure in the knowledge that if I see another owner on the road that I somehow do not already know, I'll hit it off with that person immediately?

For the answer, I defer back to Sir Anthony Colin Bruce Chapman, the founder of Lotus. You see, upon doing a bit of research, I came upon the following passage from

www.lotusespritworld.com:

*It was soon after entering the London University, that he (Colin Chapman) and Colin Dare began a second hand car sales business. The year being 1946 cars were scarce and the business boomed, growing to one to two cars being bought and sold per week. Often lectures were skipped in order that "deals" could be secured. As the inventory of cars grew the space to keep the cars became insufficient and the two Colins were seen stashing cars in the lock up shed behind Hazel's home. The normal buying and selling became easy and the two Colins grew into modifying and improving their cars before placing them on the block..."*



Photo Mike Maez

Sound familiar? Could it be that built into the DNA of the Elise and the Exige is a primal calling to its owners that sharing a lustful enthusiasm for the cars is a requisite to ownership? Perhaps. But so share Porsche, Aston, and Ferrari owners, yet in my experience the majority of these people for the most part take pride in their lack of contact with one another, except at car shows where they have been known to commiserate on the type of microfiber cloth they're using to mirror shine their sparsely driven high-performance garage queens. So, let's go one further and return to Chapman's aforementioned well-known motto: "Simplify and add lightness." Ebay is littered with Elise and Exiges for sale. Most have low mileage. You may assume this to be because the cars have only been on the road here for a short time, but I beg to disagree. You see, this car isn't for everyone. Following Chapman's philosophy, it is remarkably sparse. The ride can be jarring. Air Conditioning, if present at all, is more a study in the psychology of suggestion; any cooling effect will be due more to the knowledge it's there more than in its actual performance.

The Elise and her sister, the Exige are in a sense, much like my ex-fiancée: they look beautiful, but come with a set of challenges. The difference is that with the Elise and Exige, a select few of us embrace these challenges and look at them as further attractors. I mean this in two ways. Attractor can be defined as a characteristic that provides pleasure and attracts people. In physics, "attractor" is defined as a set of physical properties toward which a system tends to evolve, regardless of the start

ing conditions of the system. The car practically dares us to own it and few are up to the challenge; those of us who are have indeed evolved together.

So, there it is. Through Chapman's philosophy came a car steeped in simplicity, through which we have found a common appeal, not only telling us something about one another but defining our common values. From there, we've evolved, together, regardless of from where we come.

Perhaps the world could take a note from Chapman. Perhaps if we could all learn to "Simplify and Add Lightness," we could, in the humble words of Rodney King, "all just get along." Maybe do even better than that.

And in that vain, I realize why I started this article with memories of a winter day in Baltimore, gazing through a car window at Lamborghinis. Those were the days of innocence. Of everything that was real. Of simplicity and lightness, a longing for which each of us in the "Breakfast Club" shares, and is forever bound by. The thread that binds.

Reporting to detention has never been so much fun.

*You see us as you want to see us, in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions. But what we found out, is that each one of us is a brain, and an athlete, and a basketcase, a princess, and a criminal. Does that answer your question? Sincerely yours, The Breakfast Club.*

By the way, a week after my mother dashed my dreams in front of the Lamborghini dealership, I drained the oil from the engine of the Chrysler Minivan and floored it down a long straightway, seizing the engine.

Chrysler, as if to one up me, warrantied the repair. Bastards.

Well, you were wondering who the criminal in the group was, weren't you?



Photo Mark Takahashi