

# A Brief History of Lotus Elite, Eclat and Excel

The Elite was formally launched in 1974 (although prototypes date from 1972) and was designed to be a volume production sports car to suit Lotus' intended market (the luxury sports class) rather than a kit car. The chassis was a strong spine frame; front suspension was coil and wishbone; rear suspension was independent with coil spring / dampers, radius arm and transverse link front brakes were discs and rear brakes were drums. The body was styled by Oliver Winterbottom with interior design consultancy by Giugiaro and the Elite was powered by the definitive version of the 2 litre, 160bhp Lotus 907 engine (improved on the 140bhp engine used in the Jensen-Healey). With its extended roof line to accommodate 4 adults in comfort, the Elite could achieve a maximum speed of 128mph. In 1975, the type 504 Elite (Borg-Warner automatic transmission) was launched, with a top speed of 119mph. This was Lotus' first ever model with automatic transmission, and again signalled a change in the company's market orientation. Although perhaps seeming fairly conventional by Lotus standards, the Elite's specifications were at the very forefront of its peer group. In 1980 the 2.2 litre 912 engine was introduced to improve the torque of the uprated Elite, designated the S2.2. With a drag coefficient of 0.30, the Elite's aerodynamics were very good. Although the bodywork was subtly changed during the Elite's lifetime, its striking outline remained. Elite production, numbering 2535 cars, ended in 1982.



The Eclat was launched in 1975 (alongside the Esprit), and shared engine, chassis, suspension, brakes and many other components with the Elite but was over 100kg lighter! The Eclat had a coupé body shape and was marketed as a 2+2 to complement the full 4-seater Elite. Initially offered with a 4-speed manual transmission, a 5-speed variant was available from 1977. Maximum speed (tested by Autocar in 1977) was 129mph. Later Eclats (the Eclat S2.2, 1980 onwards) also received the larger 912 engine to improve torque and thus driving characteristics, together with Getrag transmission (Borg-Warner for automatics) and a galvanised chassis. In 1977 the Eclat Sprint was released as a Special Limited Edition. This used an identical 160bhp engine but had a lowered final drive ratio which, combined with its lower mass, significantly enhanced acceleration. Eclat production ceased in 1982, with 1519 cars manufactured during its lifespan.

The first Excels were launched in 1982, badged 'Eclat 3' and subsequently 'Eclat Excel' to avoid the requirements (and expense!) of extensive type approval testing. Initially quite similar in shape to the Eclat, Peter Stevens' design gave a softer nose shape with integrated lights, bumper and spoiler. Although the Excel's lines were more aggressive, the lower half body mould was retained from the Eclat. The Excel had a galvanised spine chassis, stronger rear suspension, Toyota running gear, including 5-speed manual transmission (4-speed ZF automatic transmission was introduced in the SA) and disc brakes front and rear, improved reliability and increased passenger space. Styling of the Excel was revised in 1984, with more significant changes in 1985 and 1989. In 1986 the 912 engine was further modified to increase power to 180bhp and the top speed of the Excel SE rose from 130 to 135mph. Excel production (2159 cars) ended in the summer of 1992. The last Excel made was presented to Hazel Chapman.



<http://www.lotuseliteparts.bravepages.com/Lotus%20EliteEclat.html>

**Model types by year** Information from Lotus since the 70s. Volume 1: Elite, Eclat, Excel and Elan Graham Robson. ISBN 0-947981-70-5

Model	Elite	Eclat	Excel
Derivative	Elite S1 (501 - 504)	Elite S2.2	Eclat S1 (520-524)
Years manufactured	1974-80	1980-83	Eclat Sprint 1977
Features	PAS (503 & 504)	4 speed manual (520)	Eclat S2.2 1980-82
	Borg-Warner 3-speed auto box (504)	5-speed manual (521)	Uprated 912 engine 160lb ft @ 5000rpm
		160lb ft @ 5000rpm	1981-82 1985-92
		AC, PAS (523)	160bhp 180bhp
			Optional PAS Larger rear spoiler
			Rear disc brakes Air conditioning

## Owning and running Lotus Elites/Eclats/Excels – Resources

Lotus' second generation of 'family' car (after the Elan +2) combines functionality with performance. The handling of Elite/Eclat/Excels far exceeds that of their peers and many more modern cars because of the unique chassis and suspension geometry. Many examples are owned and maintained by a worldwide network of enthusiasts, ably supported by highly experienced engineers and specialist suppliers. Many components used in the production of Elites, Eclats and Excels were sourced from other car manufacturers (e.g. British Leyland, Toyota) and can be obtained relatively inexpensively today if one knows where to look. Stocks of genuine Lotus components are also occasionally offered for sale at greatly reduced prices and clubs trackdown OEM or direct replacements for commonly needed components. Compared to other cars of similar performance, the Elite/Eclat/Excel offers excellent value for money and probably the best driving experience, with superb balance and grip in the most demanding driving conditions. Below are examples of these cars, including further development such as fuel injection, engine tuning, suspension modifications, brake upgrades and so forth. Much of this experience has been gained from racing and is available to owners to selectively improve their car in the spirit of Lotus. We hope you find it interesting!



Mike Taylor's Lotus Micra Rally car – see [www.Lotusbits.com](http://www.Lotusbits.com) for more



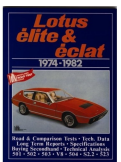
The Lotus Micra's heavily modified engine produces 230thp!



Mark Evans' 1976 Eclat, equipped with 5 litre Chevrolet engine



Dave Ryder's 1989 Excel SA



**GST Performance**  
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excel

Lotus Excel  
<http://www.lotusexcel.net>  
<http://www.excel.clublotus.com>

**The Lotus Excel Forum**  
Including The Lotus Eclat & Elite



Excel gathering, Donington, March 2006

### Information sources used in compilation

Books: Lotus - Historic Half Century 1948 - 1998. Graham Capel (1998). Historic Lotus Publications ISBN 0 9525732 02  
Lotus Since the 70s Volume 1 : Elite, Eclat, Excel and Elan. Graham Robson (1993). Motor Racing Publications Ltd ISBN 0 947981 70 5  
Lotus~ The Legend. David Hodges (1997). Parragon. ISBN 0 75252 074 1

Websites: <http://www.lotusexcel.net/phpbb/> ; <http://www.lotuseliteparts.bravepages.com/> ; <http://cgi.arcnet.force9.co.uk/cgi-bin/discus/discus.cgi> ; <http://www.spydecars.co.uk/index.html>  
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