



Once thought of as poor relations in their respective line-ups, both Elan and E-type +2s hold plenty of appeal today

which it will throttle down to a jogging pace and then pull seamlessly away. But at 4000rpm in the intermediates it still delivers a thrilling degree of raw thrust: the tail squats, the bulging nose lifts and the road is yours.

Then again, a well-driven Lotus Elan +2 owes no piece of road to almost any car: many considered Hethel's bigger Elan handled even more sweetly than the baby one. I consider it a prettier car, for sure, in many ways one of the most beautiful British coupés of the 1960s.

Oli Heath's five-speed +2S 130/5 was brought along by his father, Peter. Inside, you are lower-slung, almost skimming the ground, wearing the car rather than merely sitting in it. Like the Jag, the last couple of feet of nose disappear and the window sills feel high, with poor three-quarter vision due to the chunky roof pillars. On the plus side, the turning circle is tight, reverse is easily found and the clutch is light – civilising factors all in a sports car. Driveshaft surge remains, but you learn to work around it.

With seven instruments and upwards of 15 switches, the Elan's walnut dashboard appears contrived to impress Jaguar owners. Other than the fascia, the cabin materials are entirely synthetic, but the rear seats look marginally more inviting than the Jaguar's and, compared with the E-type's oversized foot pedals, the Elan's are dainty postage stamps.

Out on the road, steering the Elan – if you will permit me the cliché – really does seem to be

more of a thought process than a physical action. The sense of cornering forces building is not relatable to body roll, protesting tyres or loading of the steering, simply because these characteristics are not present – or at least delayed to a degree you would never discover on the road. The progressive, well-balanced four-wheel disc brakes achieve the same standard, while the light footprint of the Elan's supple ride, on those skinny tyres, is almost up there with the Jaguar in the comfort stakes.


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In pure figures the Elan is not too far behind the Jaguar in a straight line, only trailing significantly beyond about 100mph. But you have, naturally, to be much freer in your exploitation of revs and use of the gears. The Twin Cam, sluicing cheerfully through its big-throated Webers, is tunelessly aggressive in the way it pulls and revs out, but it is also surprisingly tractable. The slightly notchy

change has a narrow gate, but with familiarity is precise and light, with ratios well placed to extract the best from an engine that will spin freely, smoothly and noisily to 7000rpm.

The fact that these two coupés are nominal 2+2s is incidental to the conclusion of this story. My feeling is that anyone who could afford either car 60 years ago had the wherewithal to buy a full four-seater as back-up, even if it was a secondhand Morris Minor.

Today, the two appear on the enthusiast's radar as inexpensive entry points to the world of Elans and E-types, although the wind is taken out of the sails of that argument when values of the more desirable two-seater versions begin to falter: the 'bargains', sadly, have the same expensive tastes in specialists' chargeable hours and parts.

But, on balance and with many caveats – including acknowledging the fact I probably don't have the patience to own almost any sort of Lotus – I'd probably choose the Elan. There is much to admire about this far from unloved but moderately sidelined model. I like the shape, the uncompromising driver appeal, the fact that it achieves so much with so little – and the sheer ingenuity behind it that was uniquely Lotus, perhaps uniquely English. 

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