



BUYING A USED M100 ELAN



Brit Eckland Elan S.2

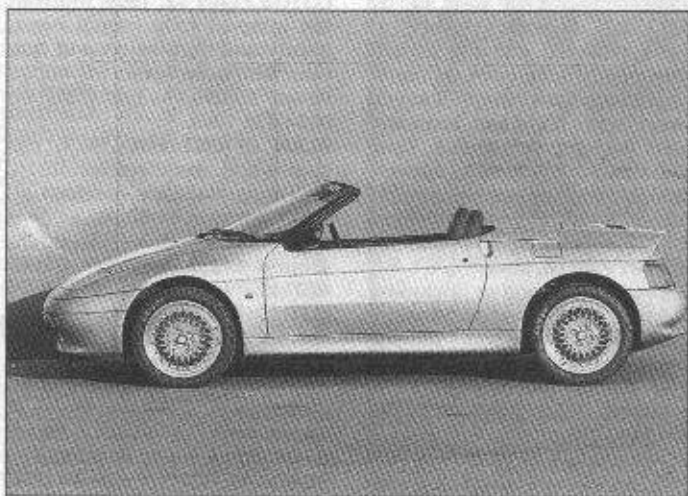
We asked Pat Thomas of Kelvedon Motors to give us a few tips on buying a good used Elan M100 S/E or the later S.2.

First of all we need to recall the history of these fine cars.

The M100 Elan was to the eager British public for over 18 months, usually by controlled rumours and inspired conjecture through Autocar who test drove prototypes, while pretending to reveal sneak scoop shots. The hype would have assured the car of a fantastic launch if this had not been deferred by several months. The whole UK dealer organisation was eventually assembled in a swanky country club hotel, wine and dined and shown a full sized clay model. And guess who paid for the slap up lunch? Some months later they were all called to Ketteringham Hall for a view of a real Elan M100. The presence for Hazel and Clive Chapman was seen, at the time, as some sort of new relationship between Lotus and the Chapman family. Years later when Lotus Marketing rented part of Ketteringham Hall things seemed to be getting cozier and cozier until somebody changed the locks? Now they are trying to sell their residual lease. The one detail that remained a secret right up to the launch was the UK retail price. This came out at £23,600 which was about £2000 above the "perceived value" of such a car, with its blistering turbo performance and magical handling. Despite its front wheel drive layout this car set new standards never before achieved or duplicated since. Some silly journalists criticised the handling because you could drive it round almost any

corner at almost any speed without losing it or even experiencing body roll or fear. It seems they wanted seat of the pants contact with what was happening and had hoped to let the back end hang out, in true TVR style. Two colours became popular, British Racing Green and Norfolk Mustard. The former colour led to the trade nickname "Lotus Frog" because the Elan did look

could probably be heard for miles. Lotus took the opportunity to improve the car in certain areas, replace suppliers of small items and relaunched it in 1994 as the Elan S.2 priced at £26,450 against the implied slogan "Buy now while stocks last as there will never be any more". The whole production run was soon spoken for and sold. Lotus enjoyed a one-off windfall boost



U.S. Spec Car

rather like a frog, crouched ready to leap.

The car never achieved the sales figures required to cover production delays and run-away development costs, especially as the pound to dollar exchange rate priced it out of the US market. In the end GM axed the car with the stroke of a pen.

In the Artioli/Bugatti era somebody said "Hi we've got a hangar full of bits, enough to make at least 800 cars and the bits are all FREE". The hysterical laughter

to their profits. These were soon being hawked around the City to boost the possibilities of financing a management buy-out. Those involved suddenly disappeared to pastures new. Meanwhile the tooling and everything else was sold to Kia in South Korea. Kia subsequently went belly up for billions of US dollars and are only now being rescued by a Detroit based manufacturer. Whether their version of the Elan will still reach these shores at the Motor Show is a

matter for conjecture. Lotus learned a lot of lessons from the Elan, hence the simplistic, minimalist philosophy behind the "Back to Chapman Basics" that proved to be the power behind the Elise.

INCREDIBLY RELIABLE

The M100 Elans set new standards of long term reliability, even better than the Excel. This reflects the new culture of quality so seriously pursued by Lotus Engineering then translated into good build quality by such long serving executives as Production Chief Maurice Dowton.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

First of all these cars need to have been serviced at the recommended intervals by a Lotus dealer or long established Club Lotus recognised specialist, NOT by any old "Fred in a Shed". Study the service history and associate bills to make sure that everything has been done on time. Don't just glance through them but sit down and really check them out.

VISUAL INSPECTION

If you can't have the car checked over in the workshops of a recognised dealer or top specialist at least get it to a garage service department ramp. Before hoisting it up go carefully over the bodywork looking inside and out for signs of fibreglass damage and subsequent repair. "Sight" the car by looking down its flanks. Look carefully for paint defects that can include osmosis related micro blisters, (rare), now make sure that the hood has not damaged the paint surface on the rear deck. Some early red cars suffered from pigment fade, on upward facing surfaces. The hood must be checked inside and out as they are beginning to split where they go over the tensioning bars or at the corners. Hoods are expensive to replace. If the car is presented to you hood down make sure the rear window is free of damage. The proposed hard tops were a failure - they wouldn't fit, leaked and whistled in the wind.

THAT ESSENTIAL COCKPIT CHECK

Any modern car offered for sale second hand can have up to £1000 worth of faults in the cockpit. Prospective buyers don't think about this once they have enjoyed their test drive. Do not buy until you have checked the

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electric window lifts, two speed wipers, two speed heater, air conditioning, mirrors, seat adjustment, seat belts, radio cassette, all instruments, indicators, horn, headlamp lifts, bonnet and boot release, etc. To summarise: pull every knob, press every button and switch every switch. Then inspect the carpets, trim and seat covering.

Front tyres wear rapidly if you really use the power and road holding. They are expensive so check them all round including the space-saver spare.

KNOWN DEFECTS THAT CAN OCCUR ON HIGHER MILEAGE ELAN M100's

1. The rear A-frames can rust right through their protective coating. As this occurs first on the upper side inspect them carefully.

2. The rear brake discs are hardly needed at all, so there is an enormous front end bias. They are therefore inclined to rust.

3. The infamous "cam angle sensor" can become faulty and give out the wrong signals. A slack, or damaged, timing belt can feed the ECU with duff information. In case of a proven failure there is now a fix, and a dealer bulletin.

4. Timing belts become brittle, especially if the car is not being used. It should be noted that these must be changed every 60,000 miles or every five years. The club favours 50,000 miles or four years. A lot of owners ignore the time stipulation and suffer the consequences. There will soon be a hardness tester for these belts.

5. The gear change cable used to have a slight problem but a test drive will soon show you if the car you are driving has a fault.

6. Exhaust down pipe brackets used to fracture with fatigue as they double as an engine steady bar. (Not planned by the engineers) Pat favours leaving them broken as the system is still secure and this stops the manifold from possibly cracking at a later stage.

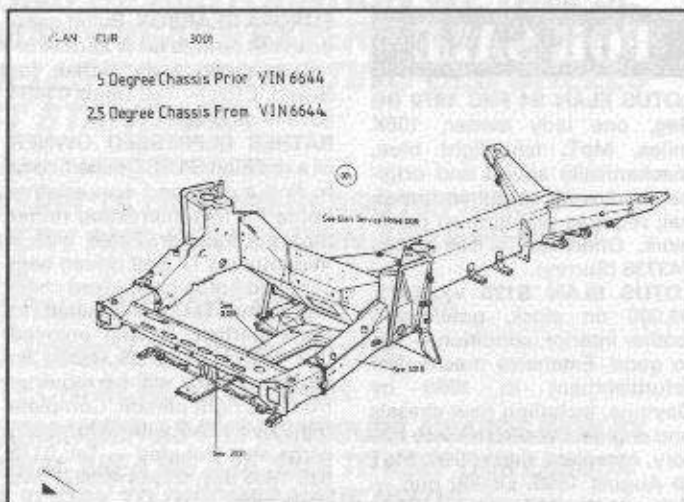
7. Probably due to not using fully inhibited anti-freeze to stop corrosion the heater pump and the engine water valves have been known to start leaking. Anti-freeze should be changed every 24 months.

8. The fault detecting apparatus, used by dealers, may come up with "CODE 43" suggesting that there is a problem with the "absolute pressure map sensor". In fact, as with turbo Esprits, the waste gate is slightly corroded, so it won't dump excess boost pressure. The first symptom is when you think the car is suddenly running with a strong tail wind, although it will "fluff" at high revs as if the rev limiter is cutting in. The cure calls for a turbocharger overhaul.

9. The Lotus Elan chassis relies on incredible dimensional accuracy to deliver outstanding road holding. A slightly distorted, accident damaged chassis can make the car a pig to drive. A full alignment check is essential.

Pat stresses that the Elan M100 is a brilliant car and a very good buy. This is an opinion shared by the likes of Paul Matty and Christopher Neils, hence the high prices still being achieved. The biggest problems when the car was introduced were that it was over-engineered and lost money. Neither of these are your problems.

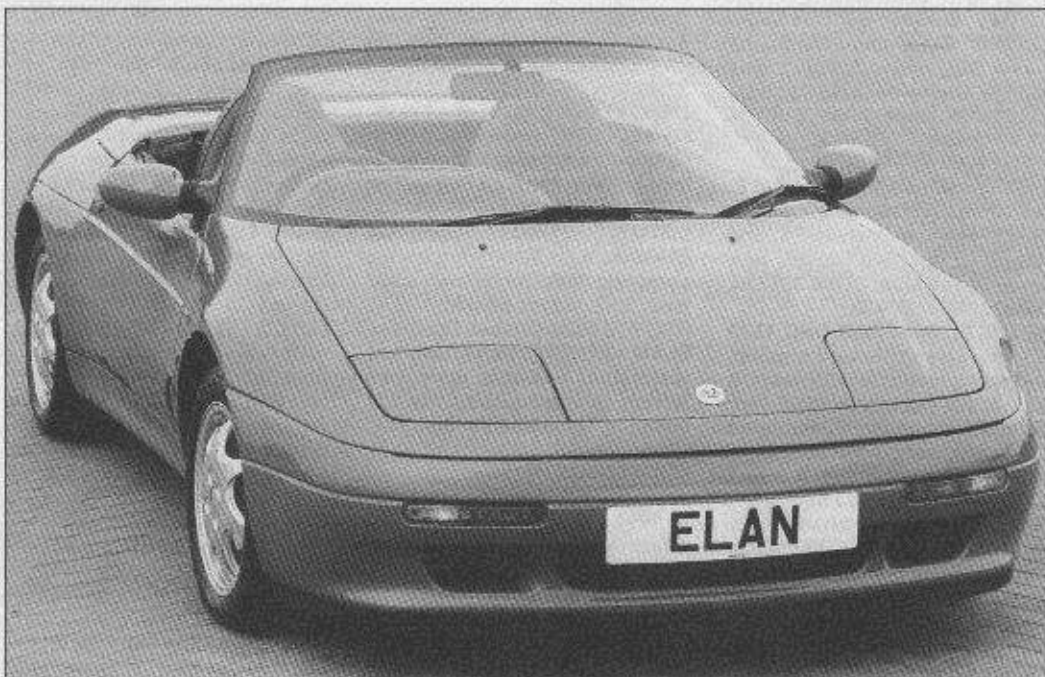
TELL US
ABOUT YOUR
M100



M100 chassis



An unfortunate number plate



Elan S/E 1989