**Elan Plus 2 SGO 2F, the Early Years**

Model; Lotus Elan Plus 2

Registration; SGO 2F

Year of manufacture; 1967

Chassis no; 50/0164

Engine no; LP 10089 LBA

Dad, Luit Arthur Hak (his father, my grandfather, was Dutch) was a petrolhead, long before the term had been invented. After serving in the Royal Navy Pacific Fleet during WW2, he worked with my grandfather in his catering business, but his real ambition was to work on cars. He attended evening classes and earned a Diploma in Automotive Engineering, with a recommendation from his tutors that he should enrol at University to study for a degree but grandad wanted him to take over the day to day running of the business, so his ultimate ambition was never realised. However, it did mean that Dad had the finances to enable him to indulge in his love of cars.

In the 1950's, he was a subscriber to Mechanix Illustrated and enjoyed the writings and opinions of "Uncle" Tom McCahill. His first new car was a Morris Traveller, bought after reading Uncle Tom’s road test in which he praised it's handling but was less enthusiastic about its performance but no worries, Dad supercharged his, turning it into something of an English hot rod.

He then bought a Triumph TR4 which he loved - until he lost a traffic-light Grand Prix to a ten year old Jaguar XK120 and decided then and there that he had to get something quicker and I'll never forget the day I was waiting in the front garden for Dad to get home from work and he pulled up on the driveway, got out of his TR4, held up that week’s copy of ‘Motor’ magazine and said to me "THIS is going to be my next car" and there was the Lotus Elan +2, LPW 120E, on the cover.

I am the middle of three sons and although strictly speaking a Plus 2 has four seats, Dad still managed to persuade Mum that the Elan could carry all five of us because my younger brother would be able to sit on a cushion in the back, on the backbone (the lack of safety awareness back then makes me shudder now!).

So, the order for a FRENCH BLUE Elan +2 IN KIT FORM, was placed at Westleigh Garage, Leigh-on-Sea in Essex and the order must have been one of the earliest as the car was delivered within three months of the road test date. An interesting aside – the dealership had the Elan driven by Emma Peel from the TV series ‘The Avengers’ on display in the showroom.

Dad enlisted the help of a couple of my older cousins who must have enjoyed the experience as they too went on to build their own Lotus’s, while I did my best to get under everybody’s feet. The build took two weeks or so of weekends and evenings and went well, with nothing being beyond Dad’s capabilities when it came to cars - and it was all done in a single garage. When it was completed and the time came to push the car out of the garage for the first time, I had the honour of sitting in the driver’s seat and steering the car into the sunlight - something I'll never forget.

The car was returned to the factory after about 3 months because of a problem with the pedal box and they fitted a revised one under a recall because of an issue with part of the mechanism.  
He also had the original exhaust manifold changed for a better design (the original may have been cast iron but not certain).

Using the car every day to commute to his business in the East End of London, a distance of only about fifteen miles but always in heavy traffic, the Elan was probably not the best mode of transport for such a journey but apart from the occasional oiling of the spark-plugs it didn’t complain too much and contrary to popular belief the car was very reliable. However, Dad was initially disappointed with the performance which wasn’t significantly better than his TR4 and the likelihood that LPW 120E was fitted with an engine that was far from standard was hinted at in that first road test and pretty much confirmed when four years later Motor tested the Plus 2S 130. In Chapman’s defence, it wasn't only Lotus that did this so he was only playing the same game as everyone else.

One evening, Dad was returning from work when another fibre-glass car (a Reliant 3-wheeler) "T" boned him at a junction, wrecking the right hand front fender of the Lotus and completely destroying the Reliant. Dad wasn't hurt and as always in such situations, his philosophy was ‘it's only a car - it can be fixed’ and he soon had it shipped to the Lotus factory at Hethel for the repair to be carried out. When negotiating the scope of work, Lotus persuaded him to have a colour change because Colin Chapman wanted to offer some new colours and to sweeten the deal, they threw in a few extra bits and pieces - including a heated rear window (it was supplied without one). After some discussion they agreed on Porsche Nepal Orange and Dad told me that when the car was ready, collection was delayed for a couple of days to allow the Lotus executives to assess the finished article in the design studio, and thus decide whether to add it to the colour chart. He later learnt from his contact on the inside that it was not a popular shade, hence it was never offered to customers when ordering their vehicle. I have attached the only known photo of SGO 2F taken during Dad’s ownership which was taken outside his house (he passed away 15 years ago but Mum still lives there) after the repaint, I hope you’ll forgive the pin-stripes – it was the ‘60’s after all!

When the Elan Sprint and +2S 130 were launched, with the big-valve head, word was that here at last was the engine specification used in LPW 120E and fitting that head would result in the performance Dad was hankering after - so this is exactly what he had done, again at Hethel - and being lighter than a Plus 2S 130, SGO 2F would certainly out-perform the later model. Interestingly, whenever he went to the factory, Dad used to get a ride to and from the local station in Colin Chapman's Ford Galaxie - not driven by the man himself though, I'm sorry to say. When he went to collect the car after the engine mods, he was driven round the test track by a mechanic to show him what the car was now capable of and before the ride, he was told that the rear wheel-bearings had been replaced and when he asked why, the reply was that ‘we always replace them before taking a customer’s car out on the track as a precaution - a failure at these speeds would be disastrous’ (co-incidentally, Dad had previously had a rear bearing fail and the reality is that they were a known weak spot). They had also put a rear differential reinforcement on it, which was basically a cheap section of angle iron that bolted across the top two mounting points on the housing and one of the diff bolts.

Another factory mod was the removal of the self-opening hood spring fitted to the early cars. When the release was pulled, a strong spring opened the hood completely and quite violently, but this was not a great idea if the latch failed because the hood could not be held down by air-pressure resulting in a non-existent view forward. So common sense prevailed and they were removed which I think may have been driven by Federal regulations.

During his time of ownership, Dad was a keen member of Club Lotus (I still have some copies of the club magazine from this time) and we used to attend the Lotus factory open day every year, with tours round the factory, road and racing car displays and various other attractions (gratuitous photo of me included).

Eventually Dad’s time with the Lotus had to come to an end and I think that by the early '70's he’d realised that the Plus 2 was impractical for a growing family, but he was biding his time until a saloon car came along that offered similar performance. That car was the Triumph Dolomite Sprint and again, when he saw the "Motor" road test, the Lotus was history. In 1973, he ordered the Triumph and he sold the Lotus to a local Lotus dealer, Grange Motors in Brentwood, Essex. They are still trading but now dealing with Aston Martin and Jaguar.

As you may have gathered, I have some wonderful memories of SGO 2F and my family and I are so glad that it is now in good hands, albeit several thousand miles away - and seems to have become something of a celebrity. It must surely be one of the oldest in existence. In fact, although the chassis number is 0164, I'm guessing that includes prototypes and in terms of production vehicles, I believe it is much earlier than that. I have a number in mind from conversations with Dad that it was the 15th chassis delivered into private ownership but of course, I could be wrong.

As I said earlier, my father's was just one of the Lotus's in my family. One cousin built a Seven and owned a Europa S2 (both long gone), another cousin built an Elan S4 - and 50 years later, still owns it, albeit modified somewhat – it’s registration is AYO 4H and I can get you more information if you are interested. My younger brother has owned an Elan, a Caterham Seven and two Lotus Sunbeams. Me? I have to confess to being a Porsche man - in fact, when he bought SGO 2F, part of me wanted Dad to invest in a 356 instead. As such, I've never owned a Lotus, but I did fit a Lotus Twin-Cam into my Ford Escort Mexico saloon, to create an Escort Twin-Cam - a great car it was too!

I must apologise for rambling on somewhat, but I hope there is some information here that will be of interest to you, the current owner and the greater Lotus community. Must of all, I would appreciate it if you could get the records corrected to reflect the fact that SGO 2F was built from a kit, rather than being a factory build.

The Dropbox file included in my email contains scans of the following documents:-

* Original bill of sale
* Two stamped pages from the service book – being a qualified engineer, Dad carried out most work on the car, including routine servicing, himself
* The original Elan and Plus 2 brochure
* The first page of the original ‘Motor’ road test
* Gratuitous photo of me, age 12, in a Formula Ford Lotus 61 at a Hethel open day

Kind regards,

Chris Hak

Dorset,

England

   
   
  
 