



## Lotus 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Track Tour



*During October, Lotus enthusiasts gathered together for a major tour of New Zealand to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the marque. With Lotus' historical connection to racing, the tour included track days at every New Zealand racing circuit - Taupo, Manfeild, Ruapuna, Levels, Teretonga and Pukekohe. As an additional bonus, organisers also arranged for a track day at the old airfield circuit at Wigram - the Lotus contingent would be the last group to drive on this historic circuit before the developers moved in.*

*The tour was organised so that Lotus owners could either do the entire event or join up with the tour when it arrived in their neck of the woods - allowing for club members to take part in the event as it moved through each region.*

Day one of the tour began with 26 Lotus cars - ranging from a classic Elite to the current Exige with the non-Lotus addition of a Cobra FIA 289 replica and a Vauxhall VX220 - gathered together in the Auckland Domain, with Auckland Museum providing an historic backdrop for the cars. Despite a damp start, 15 of the cars then left Auckland and made their way to Cambridge for lunch - with Wellingtonian, Malcolm Harrison, joining the convoy en-route in his Elise.



**Auckland Domain: The tour cars and their owners at the start**



Tour organisers had laid out a scenic route from Cambridge to Taupo, travelling over little used back roads. Simon Espie and his Lotus Europa S joined the tour along the way. However, only a few days before the tour, the local council had decided to resurface many of these roads. As a result, the tour cars were faced with a ten kilometre detour over bumpy, loose metal roads which were barely wide enough for a car. Jeremy Longman did a great job of grading the metal road with the low front spoiler of his S1 Exige before returning back down to road to find another route.



**A rare sight in NZ – Jeremy Longman’s S1 Exige**

The remainder of the cars took their time and managed to get through safely, cheered on by local farmers who took photos as the Lotii scrambled past their properties. By the time the cars arrived in Taupo they were liberally caked with dust and mud – a major clean-up session followed.

With the car’s safely cleaned and housed in Taupo, the tour entrants then departed on an evening boat cruise on Lake Taupo – a gentle ending to the first day of the tour, and a suitably relaxing prelude to the track-day planned for the following day.

### **Taupo and Manfeild**

13 entrants lined up at Taupo Raceway for the first of the event’s track-days, joined by around 60 other cars which were all enjoying a fun day at the track. All the Lotus tourists enjoyed an incident-free, excellent day of full-on, Lotus-style driving, with the day finishing at 4pm. The pleasantly exhausted drivers rounded off the day at the Gables motel for after-match drinks – the ensuing discussions concerning lap times helping everyone to wind down for the day. The general feeling of well-being helped considerably by great weather and the views of the snow-capped mountains surrounding Lake Taupo.



**The tour cars line-up at Taupo Raceway**



**Lake Taupo**

Day three kicked off with an early start as the entrants prepared to drive across the North Island's central plateau as they departed Taupo for Manfeild - and the second track day of the tour. The drop-top cars decided to tackle the Desert Road with their roofs off. Kerry Bree, co-piloting Lindsay Hamer's VX220, described the conditions perfectly - "It was bloody freezing!" However, the weather was glorious and the top of Ruapehu was clear of cloud, a suitable backdrop during a brief photo-stop. The fantastic sight of a convoy of multi-coloured Lotii - all driving a law abiding speeds and in tight formation - drew appreciation from the local constabulary as they swept down the Desert Road.



**Crossing the Desert Road - a multi-coloured convoy of Lotii**



Alas, after negotiating the Vinegar Hill turn-off, some of the drivers got a little too enthusiastic and began to indulge in a few shenanigans. However, the tour organisers were right on top of the situation and, after the transgressors had received a swift slap on the wrist, there were no more repeats of this behaviour for the remainder of the tour. After this brief interlude, the cars finally arrived at Manfeild – and were greeted by Keith Higginbotham and a team of volunteers track marshals. Keith's enthusiastic support of the tour meant that the full track was able to be utilised by the drivers; all of them later reckoning that the Manfeild leg was definitely the circuit highlight of the tour. Mike Pattison joined the tour at Manfeild, having travelled up from Wellington in his Lotus Elan Sprint, and Paul Wilton also met up with the tour in his 2-Eleven circuit racer. The only casualty of the day was Rogan Hampson's Cobra, which ended the day with a leaky radiator – later fixed with a liberal dose of radiator stop-leak additive.



### **Manfeild – officially declared by tour members to be New Zealand's best circuit**

The following day, the cars left Manfeild bound for Wellington and the Interislander ferry crossing to the South Island. Along the way, the convoy paid a visit to Colin White in Lower Hutt, who kindly provided lunch and allowed the tour entrants to inspect his freshly restored Lotus Elan +2. Colin owned this Elan when it was new but sold it many years ago. More recently, he discovered the car again, purchased it a second time and has since restored the Elan to perfection. After a pleasant lunch, the cars were driven down to the ferry terminal and strapped into place in the bowels of the Interislander. Fortunately for those with weak stomachs, the crossing was quiet and unruffled.

### **South Island**

On the other side of the straits at Picton, the disembarking tour cars were joined by a Lotus 7 before making their way to Blenheim where Ian Rogers and his mate, Hamish, turned up with their beautifully presented cars – an Esprit S3 and S4SE – then Ian shot off back home and returned with his S4 Elan.

At the end of the day, the ensuing discussion over dinner was entertaining and convivial – a continual feature of the tour and one that would provide much merriment over the coming days.



**Chevrolet van and trailer – the support/sweeper vehicle**



### A stop on the Kaikoura coast for a spot of seal watching

After their refreshing break in Blenheim, the cars set off down the coast road towards Hanmer Springs - the drivers thoroughly enjoyed attacking the demanding road up to the tourist hot-spot; an arduous route that is tailor-made for a Lotus sports car. The tour organiser, Roger Phillips, driving his Chevrolet van and 25-foot trailer - which was acting as the tour's sweeper vehicle - apparently didn't derive the same pleasure as the Lotus drivers on this tight and twisty road!

The overnight stay at Hanmer Springs allowed the drivers to unwind their arms after a day of opposite-lock driving. And early start the next morning saw everyone setting off for Christchurch, via Kaikoura - New Zealand's whale watching capital - the sun glittering off the Tasman as the cars wound their way down the picturesque coast road. Once in the Garden City, there was time for a maintenance stop at Autotek before the tour cars joined up with those at the start of the Silver Fern Rally in Cathedral Square. Several locals also turned up at the square with their Lotus cars - briefly swelling numbers.



### Service stop at Autotek - and on display at Cathedral Square in Christchurch

After this very public show, the tour entrants gathered together for a drive out to Akaroa, an old French settlement on Banks Peninsula. Yet another superb driving road – which affords some spectacular views of Akaroa Harbour – the route out to Akaroa could almost have been designed as a test circuit by Colin Chapman.

### **Ruapuna and Wigram**

After returning to Christchurch for the overnight stop, the tour headed out for a real historic highlight on the morning of day seven – a visit to the old Wigram airfield. Over thirty Lotus cars turned up for this track day, all spurred on by the news that they would be the last cars ever to race over the concrete runways at Wigram before it was finally demolished to make way for a new housing development.

Keith Pickford and Barry McFedries of the Southern Lotus Register was responsible for organising this special day at Wigram, and everyone certainly gave their cars a good work out as they roared down the airport runway and the concrete aprons. On such a large, wide airfield circuit, finding the corners on the blind runway was a demanding task – with Paul Wilton, fearless in his Lotus 2-Eleven, being tasked as the front-runner. Paul's panic stops easily showing the other drivers where not to overshoot the turns after reaching take-off speed.

Local light planes enlivened the day as they used the grassed areas for landing and take-off.

At the end of the track session, the cars were gathered together in the shadow of Wigram's control tower for a final, historic photograph – within days of this photo, the old airfield would be gone forever.



**Lotus group line-up in front of the control tower at Wigram**



However, the day's fun hadn't finished yet, and the cars drove out to Ruapuna Raceway where around eight cars enjoyed the track session – a light sprinkling of rain meant that the drivers, many of whom had never raced at Ruapuna before, were able to learn the circuit as they tip-toed around the racing lines. Towards the end of the session, the sun made a welcome reappearance and, with the correct lines around the track having been grasped, quite a few very quick laps followed.



**On track at Ruapuna Raceway (left) & Levels (right)**



**Entrants take a break from racing at Levels**

With the adrenalin still coursing through their veins after Wigram and Ruapuna, day eight added more of the same with yet another track day - this time at Levels. Here, the tour cars were joined by a group of Southern Lotus Register members, who were starting their Alpine Rally. An impromptu 'victory' lap around the circuit was organised so that everyone could drive around the track. At the end of this lap the proper track day re-commenced, although a few parade overstayars had to be cleared out before any quick laps could be considered. Later that evening, the tour joined up again with the Southern Lotus Register for dinner in Oamaru.

### **Teretonga**

Day nine was a rest day - the cars were allowed to take a breather at Oamaru while the support vehicle was pressed into service as a tour bus to ferry the drivers to Naseby to attend a local car show and swapmeet. After a few hours of wandering around the show - with everyone admiring a superb Packard roadster - a barbecue lunch at the local pub saw everyone in high spirits. On the way back to Oamaru, everyone noted more great Lotus driving roads - especially the route through McRae's Flat - and reckoned that it had to be a must for any future tour. A brief stop-over to inspect an open goldmine followed, with the day ending with everyone attending the award dinner for the Southern Lotus Register's Alpine Rally.

Another early start the following morning and the cars heading further south towards Invercargill via Dunedin - the final destination being the world's southernmost racing circuit - Teretonga. For the out-of-town tourists, the track proved somewhat tricky to find - virtually no signposts to mark the way - but perserverance eventually prevailed and the tour group finally found their way to the circuit.





**The southernmost race circuit in the world - Teretonga**

Alas, Tony Nicklin's Elise called it quits on the penultimate lap around the circuit when his engine dropped a piston - it's worth remembering that 98 octane fuel is not available south of Queenstown; Tony had filled up with 91 before the track session. Sadly, the stricken Elise would have to travel the remainder of the tour loaded onto the support vehicle's trailer.

### **Alpine Tour**

With all the South Island's circuits now having been completed, it was time to embark on the more scenic leg of the tour - with day 11 starting with a trip down SH99 to Te Anau. From Te Anau, the cars set off for Milford Sound - another great road as long as you're wary of the fact that the local works crews use a lot of grit on this road during the winter months, and a lot of it remains throughout the season. It pays not to be too adventurous when picking 'racing' lines through corners! As a reminder of how harsh winters can be in this neck of the wood, the tour encountered snow at the entrance to the famous Homer Tunnel.



**Fay Phillips at the Homer Tunnel**



Lunch was taken aboard one of the many boats that offer cruises through the dramatic Milford Sound with its spectacular waterfalls - then it was back to Te Anau for an evening meal.



### **Milford Sound and alpine touring through Arthur's Pass**

Day 12, and it was onwards to Queenstown, New Zealand's winter sports capital. Once there, the cars were left at the motel while tour entrants enjoyed a fast run in the Shotover Jet - almost the waterborne equivalent of a Lotus; check out those high g-turns! With time left over from the exhilarating jet-boat ride, everyone piled into the support vehicle again for a trip up the infamous 'Race to the Sky' hillclimb to check out the commemorative statue erected to the late, great Possum Bourne.

That night, it was Indian curry all around.



### **A waterborne Lotus? The Shotover jet**



**The pilgrimage to Possum Bourne's monument and a couple of period 'likely lads' outside the historic Cardrona Hotel**

The following morning, the long haul up the rugged West Coast began - a spectacular road trip through primordial beech forests, wild coastal scenery and glacier fields. After a brief stop for breakfast at the Warbirds museum in Wanaka, the cars headed out to Franz Josef where a helicopter tour of the glaciers and Mount Cook was on the agenda, before everyone departed for Arthur's Pass.



**Up close and personal with New Zealand's rugged alpine scenery**

After a good's night rest, the West Coast trek continued - fortified by an entertaining breakfast at Jackson's pub, where the Lotii were joined by a fleet of Ford Mustangs en-route for a reunion in Christchurch. Then began to long haul to Nelson, where the drivers enjoyed a tour of the World of Wearable Art Museum organised by Lotus club members, Tjeerd and Nicki Huizinger.

It was here that drivers suddenly realised the toll being taken on their tyres after several thousand kilometres of touring along with half-a-dozen track sessions. As a result, tyre replacements were the order of the day, with another Lotus being consigned to the support vehicle's trailer with nothing left to hold the air in its R compound tyres. The next day a trip out to the beautiful sands of Kaiarteri was on the cards, followed by an excellent lunch at Upper Moutere. The afternoon was taken up with a leisurely tour around the Horrell Ford Collection and packing sheds at Motueka, with a fine dinner - once again organised by Tjeerd and Nicki Huizinger - rounding out a relaxing day.

### **The Journey Home**

The next day, the tour departed Nelson bound for Picton and the ferry, the cars arriving in Wellington to start the three-hour drive to Tracy and Lawrence Patterson's picturesque 2000 acre hunting/farming property at Mangamahu. After a pleasant evening meal, all bunked down for the night, and next morning Lawrence and Tracy provided quad bikes for a farm tour followed by a sheep dog demonstration and an Indiana Jones-style whip contest - which most managed without losing too much skin. Another great day, and we were joined by Keith Higginbotham - who had provided the tour with such sterling service at Manfeild - and his Toyota MR2. The tour was now slowly coming towards its conclusion, with the cars winding their way back up the North Island towards Auckland - with the final destination being reached after a final overnight stop in Rotorua to soak up the local culture mud pools.



**The final track - Pukekohe Park Raceway**

The final track day of the tour was held on the 18<sup>th</sup> day - this time at Pukekohe Park raceway. 12 cars turned up for this final circuit session which, like all other track days on the tour, went off without incident. As the day progressed, individual drivers slowly made preparations to depart for home, everyone agreeing that the Lotus 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tour had been a resounding success - with most entrants pressing the organisers to make the tour an international annual event.

They may even get their wish - watch this space.

### **An Aussie Perspective**

*Adding a touch of Trans-Tasman colour to the Track Tour were two Australian entrants - Boyd Kolozs and Alan Shepherd. Both men are more normally to be seen in their beloved Jaguars - veterans of the Panama-Alaska Rally (completed in Alan's E-type) they are currently preparing the E-type for record-breaking runs in Australia - but were persuaded to travel to New Zealand to attend the tour.*

*They thought they'd be running a Jaguar - but the organisers instead fitted them into a Lotus Europa S.*





At the end of a breathless tour around New Zealand, Boyd made these comments:

“The names Taupo, Manfeild, Wigram, Ruapuna, Levels, Teretonga meant nothing to us Aussies prior to joining the Club Lotus 60th Track Tour. We thought Kiwis only had Pukekohe on which to hone their track skills.

“Similarly, the names Elite, Esprit, Elise, Exige and Europa were only vaguely familiar to us as being small nimble cars which generally attracted non-mainstream car enthusiasts. Little did we realise that these are serious sports cars generally driven by hard-core monomaniacs.

“We also had no idea that NZ authorities actually entertained road licensing cars like the 2-Eleven and home-builts. The licensing folks in Ausralia would simply vapour-lock if you rolled up to road register some of the vehicles we've had the pleasure of seeing on your roads.

“So, besides being an education, the track tour was a load of fun - meeting people, seeing the sights, 12 hours of track time, great food and drinks; and heaps of laughs.

“All track days were commenced with an address by our uber-clerk of course (aka Roger Phillips) who would deliver his rhetoric with a brand of gusto usually the preserve of a southern Baptist minister imparting a fire and brimstone sermon. Most of us got the message and only a couple of non-believers were threatened with the pain of exclusion.

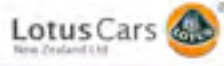
“All tracks offered different challenges and their staff and volunteer officials kept the show on the road and deserve our thanks.

“Most impressive was the competence of the Lotus Europa we were given, switching from comfortable GT road car to competitive track racer during the event. We had no glitches ort complaints and I reckon it would be near impossible to find a car engineered so completely for a ride on New Zealand's spectacular roads.

“Simply summed up - the event was lots of fun, value for money and can only go on to be better and has real potential as a permanent addition to the enthusiasts's motorsport calendar.

“All participants this year owe Roger Phillips a round of applause for bringing his vision to reality for us all to enjoy.”

*[Thanks to Simon Adams, Kerry Bree, Boyd Kolozs, Tony Nicklin, Lindsay Hamer and Tjeerd Huizinger for providing photographs and comments.]*



## **Lotus 60th Birthday NZ Track Tour: The Route**

### **Stage 1 North Island**

Start: Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> October from Auckland Domain.

Finish: Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> October, Wellington

Route: Auckland-Cambridge-Taupo-Manfeild-Wellington

Track days: Taupo (11<sup>th</sup> October), Manfeild (12<sup>th</sup> October)

### **Stage 2 South Island**

Start: 13<sup>th</sup> October, Wellington

Finish: 19<sup>th</sup> October, Invercargill

Route: Wellington-Blenheim-Kaikoura-Christchurch-Akaroa-Timaru-Mt Cook-Oamaru-Gore-Invercargill

Track days: Ruapuna and Wigram (October 16<sup>th</sup>), Levels (17<sup>th</sup> October)

### **Stage 3 South Island**

Start: 20<sup>th</sup> October, Invercargill

Finish: 25<sup>th</sup> October, Picton

Route: Invercargill-Manapouri-Te Anau-Milford Sound-Wanaka-Franz Josef-Stillwater-Murchison-Nelson-Picton

Track day: Teretonga (20<sup>th</sup> October)

### **Stage 4 North Island**

Start: 26<sup>th</sup> October, Picton

Finish: 28<sup>th</sup> October, Pukekohe

Route: Picton-Wellington-Wanganui-Tokaanu-Rotorua-Tauranga-Pukekohe

Track day: Pukekohe (28<sup>th</sup> October)